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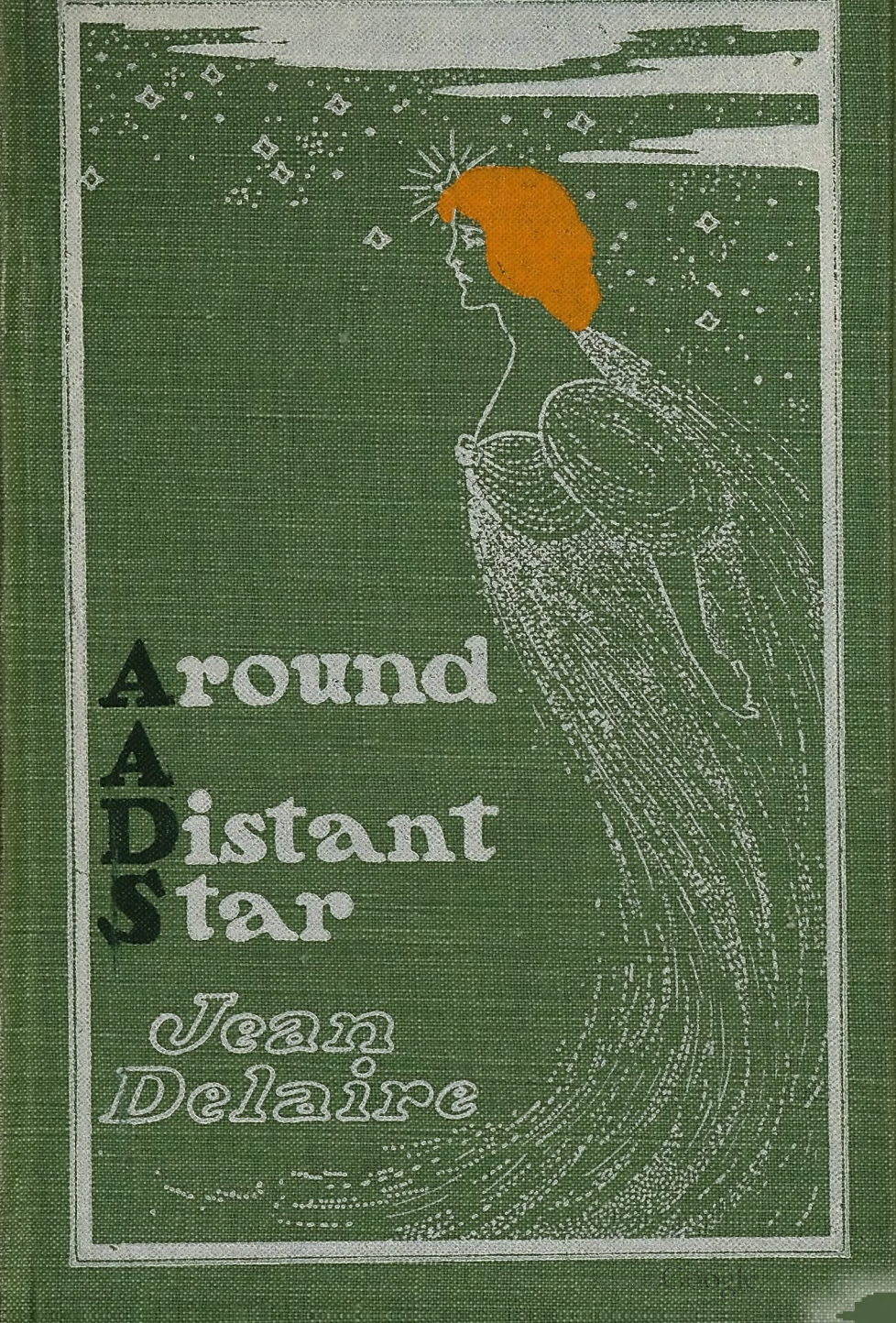
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"Were we alone in this strange world?"

Around a Distant Star

Frontispiece to Book I

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Around a Distant Star

By

Jean Delaire
Author of "A Dream of Fame"

With Seven Illustrations and Initial Letters by
Alfred Touchemolin

London
John Long
13 and 14 Norris Street, Haymarket
1904

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To

CAMILLE FLAMMARION

THE MASTER WHOSE IMMORTAL WORKS—"RÉCITS DE L'INFINI," "LUMEN," "LES TERRES DU CIEL"—HAVE BROUGHT THE HEAVENS NEARER TO THE EARTH

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY A FAITHFUL DISCIPLE

JEAN DELAIRE

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CHAPTER I

ROY AT SCHOOL

OYAL STAUNTON was a wonderful boy from his earliest years. At college, long before his genius had developed or even revealed itself, he was king of all his school-fellows, and hardly a lad among us ever dreamt of questioning his right to the throne.

Was it the instinctive recognition of a master-mind? The prescience of the glory that awaited him? Or was it simply the charm of his voice, the magnetism of his dark grey eyes, deep and beautiful as a woman's? Being mere boys at the time, we none of us indulged in introspection or analysis of first causes; we did not even grace our allegiance by a philosophical name; and when we had informed a new-comer, with utmost emphasis of voice and manner, that Royal Staunton was "a grand fellow," we had no further praise to lavish on our hero.

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We knew he was the cleverest boy in the school; we knew his knowledge of mathematics had been the wonder of three successive masters; we knew he was absolutely fearless, and rarely left a kind word unsaid. But we had known other boys to be as clever—almost as clever—and others to be as generous, and others as brave, yet we had not loved them as we loved Roy. Perhaps, after all, we loved him for the last and best reason of friendship, the one which knows not reason, but loves, as Montaigne would have said, "simply because it is you—because it is I."

When I first met him, at the private school where the best of our youth was passed, I, Clive Delafield, was that most forlorn and pitiable of creatures—a spoilt and only child, suddenly transplanted from home to live among strangers in a strange land.

I was born in India, and lived there twelve happy years in our beautiful Himalayan home; then came the day of my exile to England, with all the unknown terrors of school life awaiting me in the dim distance. The dreariness of an especially damp English autumn, the dumb craving for all I had left behind me, also, I fear, a good deal of constitutional idleness, made the early days of my school life more miserable even than my imagination had anticipated them. I had yet to learn that the "prison-house," of which I had drawn so sombre a picture in my first letters to

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India, was in reality a very near approach to the ideal school. Our principal, Dr Clayton, was that rarest and most delightful of men : a schoolmaster with original ideas on education ; and the retrospective comparison of Hill Crest College with other institutes in the United Kingdom forces me to confess that Dr Clayton's ideas bore fruit of a distinctly pleasant flavour for youthful palates.

The house—a long, low building, belted, Oriental-wise, with a wide verandah—was situated on an eminence that almost deserved the name of hill, overlooking one of the fairest parts of Kent. A beautifully kept lawn carpeted the grounds in front of the house, and sloped gently down to the foot of the knoll, while here and there tall groups of cedars broke the soft, velvet-green monotony with their rugged outlines and sombre tints. A narrow stream, flatteringly named "The River," well-nigh encircled the base of the hill, and on this, during the summer months, we floated miniature crafts that initiated us to all the pleasures of navigation—shipwreck included. Further on, a small wood spread before us the tempting mysteries of its imaginary depths ; and beyond it, the vast, perfectly level plain stretched out as far as the eye could follow it, rich with promises of every sport dear to the schoolboy's heart.

But as ill-luck would have it, the first days of my arrival were the most dismal of the year ; the ground was sodden, the beautiful lawn turned into

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the semblance of a marsh, the magnificent view hidden behind an earth-cloud of mist and rain. Indoors, nothing was lacking that would conduce to comfort and general cheeriness; bright fires burnt in every grate, and the reading-room was a perfect treasure-trove for the lover of books. But brought up as I had been in our mountain solitudes —a child of Nature in the most absolute sense—I had not yet learnt to make friends either with books or with my fellow-creatures, and I felt pitiably alone and forlorn. But soon the Deliverer came—Roy, my hero, who vanquished all evil spirits, and, like a joyous conqueror of old, brought light and gladness in his steps.

He was older than I by two years—an immense difference at that age, and I looked up to him in much the same way as a raw recruit might gaze at the victorious general of a hundred battlefields. He accepted the rôle of mentor thus thrust upon him with his usual simplicity and good-will, helped me through all the difficult paths of school life, and in his train of willing subjects easily made me the most devoted of slaves.

The only son of an English engineer of peasant ancestry, and of a high-born Spanish lady, Royal Staunton seemed to have inherited the most notable characteristics of two nations: the passionate love of the beautiful, the wonderful, ever-youthful enthusiasm, the gift of easy, often eloquent translation of his feelings into words,

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that distinguish the man of Latin blood, together with the severe self-control, the patient, stubborn, all-conquering energy of the Anglo-Saxon. Let it not be surmised, however, that he was at any time in his youthful career that wildest of all wild improbabilities—a faultless boy. Not in vain did he inherit, on his mother's side, the pride and passion of ten generations of hidalgos; he had all the Spaniard's quick changes of mood and nervous irritability of temper, although his anger rarely passed from the inward to the outward phase. A heightened colour, a tightening of the lips, five or ten minutes' obstinate silence, were generally the sole signs of his wrath. One thing, one only, made him absolutely ferocious, and that was any premeditated interruption of his studies—I might add of his pleasures as well, for Roy threw himself body and soul into everything he did. He was a hard worker and a merry player, and he resented as deeply being disturbed in a game of cricket or football as in the working out of an algebraic problem or the study of a Greek verb. Indeed, this peculiar trait of his one day led to a fight which is still remembered at Hill Crest College, and will probably be handed down to posterity as the famous duel between "The Prince" and "The Bully."

That Royal was an inventive genius, everyone knew; within the first six months of his stay at Hill Crest he had invented two different kinds of

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flying machines—one of them actually did fly a few yards—a folding bridge for use in warfare, and a gliding boat propelled, theoretically at least, by electricity. On a certain half-holiday, when all the boys were at play in the grounds, Roy locked himself up in his room to put the finishing touches to a toy model of the gliding boat. Bob Lawrence, surnamed "The Bully"—the villain of our school-room stage—for some reason or other resented his absence from the playground, and determined to call the "day-dreamer" to order. A cricket ball, aimed by Bully at Roy's open window, fell with unfortunate precision on the latter's work-table, breaking the delicate machinery into atoms.

In a moment Roy was in the garden, the *furore* of an angry god blazing in his eyes. With unerring instinct he walked straight to the Bully.

"You coward!" he called out in his clear ringing voice.

"You fool!" hissed Bully, shaking his burly frame in readiness for the fight.

And fight they did, and a better fight was never seen in the grounds of the College. Bully was far taller and stronger-limbed than Roy; he was the finest athlete in the school; and clearly it would be another version of the David and Goliath duel—but clearly also the Lord of Hosts once more favoured the weaker and worthier champion. Both fought like demons, but Roy was in the mood of heroes, the mood that makes for death or

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victory, and within ten minutes Bully was lying on the trodden grass in a state closely resembling that of the gliding boat's ill-fated machinery.

Alas for human nature !—I believe this fight did more to establish Roy's popularity on a firm and lasting foundation than all his mental and moral qualities combined. Before the fight, he had been loved by a chosen few—a master among his disciples—afterwards, he was worshipped by the multitude, and stood as a minor divinity in the midst of his devotees.

It was some time after this incident that Roy's genius suddenly turned into a new path. A book of astronomy fell into his hands, and, straightway fired with enthusiasm, he set aside everything else, neglected his favourite studies, and forgot the world and himself in the pursuit of the new dream.

The fire seemed too violent to last, and we all predicted that before the next lunar month he would have left the stars to their place in creation and returned to earth and the invention of gliding boats and folding bridges. We were mistaken. However brightly burned the new flame, it did not appear likely to burn itself out. For fully two years Roy pored over astronomical works, and daily read out of Heaven's eternal book.

" I shall be an astronomer and discover a new planet," he told me confidently one evening, as we strolled together on the lawn, beneath the star-

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strewn dome. "Or else—I shall invent something wonderful."

"What?" I asked eagerly.

"I do not know,—yet. I only know it will be wonderful. I feel it here," he added, as he meditatively passed his hand over his brow.

I gazed at him admiringly, for I believed my hero capable of scaling the Heavens—figuratively; further than this, even my exalted imagination did not carry me; and although prophesies of future greatness were freely bestowed upon Roy, not one of us, even the most ardent of his admirers, ever guessed that he would one day achieve the most daring and magnificent enterprise that the brain of man has yet conceived.

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CHAPTER II

ROY AT HOME

MIDWAY between St Hélier and Beaumont, in the beautiful isle of Jersey, stands, at some distance from the road, a flower-decked cottage bearing the name of *Estrella Lodge.*

This was the home of Roy's mother, Mrs Staunton, who, in her young days, had been Señorita Manoëla de Valencienas, chief maid of honour to the girl-queen Mercedes. She lived in strict retirement since the death of her husband, the successful engineer, Paul Staunton, whom she had married for love, against the will of all her family. The union had been a happy one—love marriages sometimes are—and the merry-eyed little Spanish lady seemed never to have regretted the staid splendours of Alfonso's court in the homely life of a middle-class English gentlewoman.

Like most Spanish mothers, Mrs Staunton was passionately devoted to her children—Royal, the elder, and his sister, little Estrella. Although her

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income was a modest one, no expenses were spared for Roy's education ; and if mere strangers were heard to predict great destinies for the boy, it may be imagined how wonderful were the mother's dreams regarding the future of her only son.

To this pleasant little lady, and her no less pleasant home life, I was introduced by Roy one fine summer eve at the beginning of the long vacation, three years after my arrival in England. I was then fifteen ; Roy was seventeen, and for him the time had come to leave school and enter upon his chosen career. As for me, though Hill Crest College had long since become a home in the best sense of the word, yet I would gladly have given my right hand to follow my friend in his first flight into freedom. But my father's will was inexorable : even if I did not eventually enter Sandhurst, I must stay at least another year at college.

Now, for some time past I had worshipped at the shrine of *belles-lettres* with an ardour almost equal to that displayed by Roy in the pursuit of his beloved science, and I very soon determined to follow whither my instinct led. True, I was aware that my father destined me to a military career, or, failing that, to enter, as he had done, the Indian Civil Service ; but since, all the world over, parents propose and children dispose, I had little fear of any serious opposition on his part, nor was my sense of security ill-founded. "I give

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you a twelvemonth to mature your mind," wrote my father. "If, at the end of that time, you are still bent on becoming a bookworm—your will be done!"

The last two years of my school life had passed, as most school days do, in much fun and frolic, a little study, and many dreams of the morrow. Roy's dreams and mine were simple in the extreme. We would both be famous and awaken a sleepy old world with the clarion call of our exploits. Had we lived four or five hundred years ago, we would both have started on a fine summer's day, with squire and page, to discover new lands, redress the wrongs of the people, and rescue fair damsels held in durance vile. Being merely modern lads, peering with eager eyes across the threshold of the twentieth century, we decided to be, one a man of science, the other a man of letters, and both famous beyond the dreams of young ambition.

Roy's decision did not quite meet Mrs Staunton's views. The very vagueness of the term "man of science" was in ill accord with the clearness of her ambition. When Roy repeated to her what he had so often told me at school, that he would be either an astronomer or an inventor—or both—the little lady did not rest content with this affirmation. An astronomer meant a star-gazer—at best a fruitless employment! And as for an inventor—well, the glory of that career depended

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on the object invented, which might be anything, from aerial navigation down to a patent boot-fastener. So she gently remonstrated with her too clever son—to thwart his wishes was out of the question—and begged him to decide for one of those well-defined professions wherein, so at least the little lady imagined, fame and fortune were the certain prize of every clever candidate. But Roy wisely chose a middle course. With his mother's favourite, the Bar, he would not be reconciled, but resolved to become an engineer, like his father, and do his utmost to earn a competence in this career; at the same time, he would complete his scientific knowledge and slowly win his way to the distant plane of great discoveries.

Those days spent with Roy in his beautiful Jersey island were the happiest I had known since my sunny childhood in India, when I roamed at will from our garden on the hillside into the wilderness of pine-woods beyond. Strolling from morning to night, Roy and I, on the beach or over the cliffs—day-dreaming in the valleys, where, at setting sun, the merry troop of dairymaids came a-milking in the pastures—exploring, on stormy days, the mysterious recesses of the *Trou du Diable*, that giant's funnel of black granite, with only the sky above and the seething sea below— in calm weather cruising around the lovely *Baie de Bonne Nuit*, where heather-covered downs descend in purple glory

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to the sea,—our life passed as passes a happy dream of mid-summer. We were both at the ideal age for perfect enjoyment of nature—the happy age when the spring-time enters our very souls, and there is less of April in the breeze than in our own hearts—when as yet no discordant note jars in the great symphony of life.

Sometimes, but rarely, we were accompanied in our walks by Roy's sister, twelve-year-old little Estrella. She was a shy, uninteresting child—so, at least, I judged her from the height of my fifteen summers: pale, with light brown hair and large grey eyes—an effaced copy of her elder brother.

My opinion of girls in general had hitherto been an altogether unfavourable one; and as I had never met any, this opinion appeared to be based on the solid foundation of intuitive knowledge. My acquaintance with little Estrella, the child who hardly ever left her mother's side and seemed afraid of all our games, was not likely to make me reverse my judgment. Perhaps, unconsciously, I was jealous of Roy's undoubted attachment to this little sister of his; on her side, she perhaps quite as unconsciously resented my presence as an intrusion into the family circle, an interruption to the delightful intimacies of former holidays when she had had her brother all to herself. Be that as it may, I rarely passed under the fuchsia-covered porch of *Estrella Lodge* without thinking it a pity

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that so pleasant a home should have been named after so insignificant a little bit of humanity.

The time was to come when this opinion would have changed — with many others. But what would be the use of opinions if we could not change them, like clothes, at all the seasons of our lifetime?

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CHAPTER III

AN ASTRONOMICAL LECTURE

HAD been an inmate of *Estrella Lodge* for nearly a month when Roy one morning burst into my room with a radiant face.

"Read this!" he exclaimed, handing me a slip of red paper.

"Professor Tweed—Royal Astronomical Society—August 20th, at eight o'clock—Popular Lecture—The marvels of the sidereal universe—Systems of double stars. . . ."

I glanced at Roy inquiringly.

"Well?" I asked.

"Well! Is it not glorious? For the last twelve months I have been dying to know something of double stars! The astronomy books at school merely mention their existence, and that is all — old works, you know, written when they were only just discovered. . . . Hurrah for old Tweed! . . . You will come, Clive?"

I nodded. "Yes, if you go."

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"If!" he repeated with some indignation. "If! Why, I would sell my last crust of bread to go!"

And I verily believe he would.

On the day fixed for the lecture, a full hour before the appointed time—O enthusiasm of early youth!—Roy was dragging me with feverish impatience over the road to St Hélier—the fountain-head, temporarily, of all astronomical knowledge.

It was to be a popular lecture; and though Professor Tweed, with more courtesy than candour, affirmed that no one present could ignore the mechanism of the solar system, he prudently began his lesson with a limelight diagram of the sun and planets.

In his preliminary remarks he strove to give his hearers some idea of the magnitude and magnificence of the Universe.

"When on a fine summer morning," he began in his pleasant, even voice, "you stand on the highest hill or cliff of this beautiful isle of Jersey, and look at all the fields and meadows and gardens and villages lying at your feet and stretching far out towards the sea, Jersey seems a very large island, does it not? But when, on a map of the United Kingdom, we compare it with the proud, seagirt land we call England, does Jersey look any larger than a rock lost in the sea? And what becomes of England itself compared with

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the whole continent of Europe? What is Europe compared with the vast continents of Asia and Africa? What is the united mass of all the continents in the world compared with the mighty expanse of ocean that envelops the earth?

"We cannot realise the immensity of our planet's surface—and can we realise that this surface is but an infinitely small fraction of its total volume? Can we realise that, seen from a distance in space, the highest peaks of our highest mountain ranges would look but as a grain of sand on the skin of an orange? Can we realise this magnitude? Our proudest snow-clad peaks, rising so boldly heavenward with their heads in the cloud, are nothing but an invisible rugosity on the surface of our planet!

"And yet this world of ours—this giant of worlds, as it appears to us—is itself but an imperceptible atom compared with the sun, whose volume exceeds *over one million times* that of the earth! Here indeed all our little attempts to realise the greatness of heavenly bodies must fail. We may discover their volume; we may measure their relative distance; we may determine their velocity. Realise their magnitude we cannot. We can express it in numbers, that is all.

"We can say of the sun, centre of our system, that its volume is one million two hundred and eighty thousand times the volume of the earth, and that if the eight principal planets, of which

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ours is one of the smallest, and the hundreds of little worlds that gravitate between Mars and Jupiter, and all the satellites of all these planets, were joined in one stupendous mass, the volume thus formed would still be *five hundred times* inferior to the volume of the sun !

" We may add that the heat generated by the sun at every second of its existence is equal to the heat that would result from the combustion of eleven quatrillions, six hundred thousand billions of tons of coal burning simultaneously. We may add also—if our brain does not reel before these colossal figures—that the dark spots, invisible to the naked eye, which periodically appear on its radiant disc, are twice and even three times the size of the earth ; while the gigantic flames of burning hydrogen often observed in solar displosions have been known to attain a height corresponding to the earth's diameter—*multiplied by ten !*

And this prodigious world of fire that we call our sun is itself only a star among stars—a grain of sand in a shoreless ocean. On a clear, frosty winter's night we see hundreds of stars shining above us ; with the help of a telescope we discover millions and tens of millions. Every one of these stars is a sun, probably the centre of a planetary system like our own !

Splendid as appears our solar system—the Sun-king and all his planetary court, colossal Jupiter with his brilliant train of satellites, Saturn the

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Magnificent amid his luminous rings and his eight moons, the fiery comets flying with unimaginable speed through the earth's orbit,—what are these splendours compared with those of coloured double and treble stars, worlds where sun gravitates around sun, sapphire star around a star of silver, opal-tinted sun around a sun of amethyst? What words can describe the wonders of a planet lit by several multi-coloured suns, worlds where darkness is unknown, where the topaz day follows the blue, or the purple day the golden? Yet these worlds exist; it is no fairy tale of Science, no dream of half-crazed astronomer. At myriads of miles from us gravitate these systems of double, treble, multiple stars, with all the inconceivable beauties of their planets and satellites."

Once well launched into his subject, the professor grew more concise and more scientific. In a few brief sentences he explained the more remarkable of the systems of double and treble coloured stars :— Alpha Centauri with its two suns, one golden, the other white, revolving around each other in a period of eighty-five years—Hêta Cassiopeia with its yellow and purple suns, and its slow revolution of two hundred and twenty-two years—Sigma Lyra with three silver-white suns—Xi Scorpion with three suns of gold ;—and from these he passed to the wonder-world of star clusters and nebulæ. He described the magnificent cluster in the Southern Cross, wherein sparkle over a hundred stars with

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every colour of the rainbow,—sapphire, ruby, emerald, topaz—living gems of the sky,—and the still more marvellous cluster of Centaurus, composed of thousands of suns, seemingly forming one incommensurable mass of radiant matter. Then he spoke of the nebulæ, globes in formation, embryos of universe, and touched, *en passant*, the still mysterious question of the origin and end of worlds. He closed his lecture with some telling remarks on the inconceivable immensities of interstellar spaces.

"We know," he said in his concluding sentences, "that the distance between the sun and our little earth is ninety-one millions of miles. Yet the distance between our earth and the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, is two hundred and twenty-two thousand times that distance! Light, which travels with the prodigious velocity of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second, takes three years and six months to traverse this distance; while sound, to cross the same distance, would need three millions of years! Therefore—and this is a fact rarely realised—we do not see 'the starry heavens' as they are at the moment they meet our upward gaze; we do not see the stars of to-day, but the stars of the past—a past varying in length as vary the distances between these stars and our earth. For, since a ray of light will take three and a half years to pass from Alpha Centauri to our own world, it must follow, strange as it may seem, that

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we do not see this star as it is to-day, but *as it was three and a half years ago*! Inversely, could we have wings more wonderful than poet ever dreamed of, could we fly in one moment across these colossal distances and land on our nearest star—or better, on one of the planets that no doubt gravitate around it,—we should see our earth as it was three and a half years ago, since the light-rays will take that time to traverse the distance between us. Did we take our flight still farther into space, and alight on Sirius, we would see our planet as it was over twelve years ago; and did we recede still farther we would see, were we gifted with supernatural sight, our native world as it was twenty, fifty, a hundred years ago, as it was in the times of Elizabeth, of Alfred the Great, of Cæsar, as it was in the time of the early Greeks, of the first Egyptian civilisation—as it was before human footsteps had left their impress upon earth. Well has a French astronomer said that *light makes of the past an eternal present.*"

I glanced at Roy as the last words were spoken. His very soul seemed to have leapt into his eyes as he strained forward, his lips parted, his breath coming and going in quick, eager gasps, his fingers nervously interlaced. For some minutes I left him to his dreams; then, touching his arm:

"Are you ready, Roy?" I whispered.

He started and looked at me, or rather *through*

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me, into vacant space. His eyes, of a deep, changeful grey in the daytime, became like dark velvet at night; now they were black as jet, and shone like stars. God knows what visions of infinity filled them at this moment!

The crowd was slowly filtering out of the rooms with a dull noise of shuffling feet and a murmur of low voices. He awoke at last.

"Come," he said; and together we left the hall.

Ah, the sweet freshness of the breeze from hill and sea after the closeness of the heated rooms! How silvery green shone the meadows under the moon, how full of dreamy suggestion was the scent of wild hyacinths and primroses blossoming by the roadside!

For some time we walked in absolute silence, each far from the other in a world of his own. At last Roy spoke:

"Clive, do you think it can be done?"

It was my turn to stare and fail to understand the spoken words.

"Do you think it can be done," he repeated, with some impatience,—"what this man said—to journey to the stars—to the most distant stars?"

"I did not hear him say that," I answered vaguely, as I tried in vain to remember such an affirmation in Professor Tweed's mouth.

"No, he did not say it, but it was implied in all he said: it ran through every word he uttered! 'If man did this—if man did that—if we could

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travel as light travels—if we could go from planet to planet, from star to star. . . .' *If*—— !"

He was silent for the next two or three minutes, then suddenly he asked :

"Have not things as wonderful been achieved, Clive ?"

"As wonderful as a journey to the stars ?" I asked incredulously.

"Look, Clive," Roy continued, slipping his arm through mine, "look at what man already has done. Can we conceive anything more remote than the stars ? The nearest star is at such a prodigious distance, that light, which only takes eight minutes to reach us from the sun, needs three and a half years to bridge over the gulf between us ! Yet man, little atom on a microscopic planet, has in a measure conquered these immensities. . . . He has measured the distance of these stars, he has discovered their velocity, he has analysed their elements. Man has done this, and done it a few hundred years only after the discovery of the real Universe. . . . Think of it, Clive ! It is only four centuries since Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, revealed to us the world *as it is*. Only four centuries ago man believed his little earth to be the centre of creation, with the moon and all the stars as luminaries for his nights ! In these four centuries man has done all this—and you think he will not go further and ever further until all creation lies as an open book before him ?"

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"Undoubtedly, there will be other discoveries," I answered; "but to discover a new star or planet, and to find a way of journeying to this star or planet, are two quite different things. One is possible, the other——"

"Impossible? That is what people always say of any daring enterprise! The more we learn about Nature's laws, the more wonders become possible to us—until we know all that can be known—and then shall all the world lie in the hollow of our hand!"

I glanced curiously at Roy. He was walking rapidly, his head thrown back, his eyes lost in an inward vision.

"This is wild talk, Roy," I ventured, after a moment's silence. "Surely we can never know everything? And then——Well, I have not studied science as you have—but I cannot help thinking that whatever wonders man may achieve in *this* world, on *this* earth, he can never do wonders beyond it, never leave this planet——"

"Why not?" queried Roy abruptly.

The question left me silent for a while.

"Why not?" he continued. "The difficulties in the way are perhaps not greater than hundreds of difficulties already successfully overcome. It seems to me that the genius who measured the stars and weighed the planets can also discover the means of communication between earth and sky."

"Well," I replied, meditatively, "the man who

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would do this would assuredly be the greatest genius that ever lived—the greatest savant as well! He would have to be astronomer, physicist, mathematician, and philosopher, all in one."

"Perhaps I shall be that man," said Roy in his low, thrilled voice.

And at this, even I could not help smiling at the vagaries of my hero.

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CHAPTER IV

SELF-REVELATION

TWO years elapsed before I returned to *Estrella Lodge*, and then it was only on a farewell visit, previous to my definitely leaving England to return to India.

In spite of Mrs Staunton and Roy's pressing invitation—and my own wishes—I had been obliged to spend my two last vacations with an uncle of my father, General Massey, newly returned from Egypt. The general and his wife were a kindly old couple when they forgot, as they soon did in my presence, their old-world stiffness and formality ; but however pleasantly time might pass at Estcourt, in riding, hunting, and every form of outdoor amusement, the Jersey cottage and its inhabitants were not forgotten, and I looked forward with intense eagerness to our next meeting.

It was with beating heart that I found myself once more on the boat, watching, from the spray-

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moistened deck, the dark cliffs of Jersey rise out of the waves, gliding nearer, ever nearer, until I could see Roy standing on the quay, gaily waving his cap as our big boat puffed into the harbour.

Yet, in spite of all, my visit did not begin under very favourable auspices. Mrs Staunton was still the sweet-faced, motherly little woman of old; the cottage was more than ever fragrant with flowers, and noisy with the continuous hum of bees, that sole music of a summer day's great silence; little Estrella herself was less timid and seemed disposed to be friendly. But Roy—alas! Roy was changed, and for three long days I wandered about disconsolately, seeking the friend of old and finding him not.

Roy was changed even in appearance, for never to my knowledge had he looked in delicate health, yet he was now as pale and slim as the traditional bookworm—not at all like the robust, bronzed son of the sea I had parted from, two years ago. But in his manners the change was more pronounced still; the lively, enthusiastic lad was transformed into a silent, moody, morose young fellow.

I had lately, in my uncle's library, come across one or two very romantic novels of the old school, which had initiated me into the mysteries of lovers' raptures and lovers' torments, so that my first idea was that Roy had fallen in love and was pining away for the sake of a lady fair. From this discovery to the determination of obtaining his

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confidence was but a step; and one day, as Roy and I were walking up and down the garden at setting sun, I boldly begged to be made the sharer of his secret.

"My secret?" he asked, looking rather bewildered as he turned his deep eyes full on me.

"Yes, your secret. I have guessed it, Roy; you are in love!"

Roy's genuine astonishment made me feel instantly ashamed of my sentimental surmise.

"In love!" he repeated with one of those bright smiles, now so rare, that made him look once more like his old self. "What a queer idea, Clive! Who has made you think so?"

"No one," I answered confusedly; "but you seem so absent-minded, so sad at times, that I wondered——"

A look of pain came over Roy's face. With a rather brusque movement he slipped his arm through mine as we paced more quickly the narrow garden path.

"No, Clive," he said, "it is not that,—only—I am worried—I am worried more than I can tell!"

Although his voice was low, a tumult of passion thrilled through it.

"What is it that worries you?" I asked curiously.

He dropped his hand from my arm in a movement that seemed quite unconscious.

"Ah, what is it!" he muttered in a tone of

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utter discouragement. Then, after a moment's silence: "It is everything, Clive," he declared tragically, "everything! Life, death, all that is, all that is not!"

I stared at my friend with wide eyes. Such a mood of Byronic despair was so new in Roy that I could hardly believe it to be serious. Yet a glance at his set and stern face convinced me that never in his life, perhaps, had he been more deeply in earnest.

We had paced in silence the entire length of the garden before he continued:

"If anyone has had any influence over me, any share in this, it is a man I met in London, last winter, when I studied engineering. Sometimes I feel my meeting with him was providential, sometimes I think it was a curse. He has changed my view of life, my ambition, everything! And now I am bewildered, and, turn where I may, I see no light."

My wonder increased with every word he spoke; but so fearful was I of losing the promised confession, that I dared interrupt him with neither comment nor question.

"Life," he continued after another pause,—"life seemed so simple before I met him! It was a straight road, with happiness at the end—happiness in work accomplished, in ambition realised. You know how it was with me, Clive, in the old days, when we were boys at school?"

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I nodded gravely, too young myself to smile at the solemnity with which a boy of nineteen spoke of the youth that was past.

"I was happy then," Roy continued passionately. "Everyone is happy who does not know life! But this man, Clive, is the strangest creature in the world. He is an Atheist, who spends his life in doing good. He believes in nothing, absolutely nothing, beyond the world which his five senses reveal, and he is clever—yes, and learned! The good he does in the East End of London no one can tell—but is it good? He gives freely to those who starve, but to the hungry soul he has no bread to give."

There was another silence, and I felt I could no longer hold my peace. With the superabundant wisdom of my seventeen years I looked upon all difficulties of the metaphysical order with infinite contempt, and I wondered, with rising fear, if it were possible that religious controversies were the sole cause of Roy's despair,—if the genius that had invented flying machines and pondered over inter-planetary communication could have fallen a victim to the morbid self-torment of a student of theology.

"And is this all, Roy?" I asked with a smile. "Your faith shaken by a meeting with an Atheist?"

Roy winced at the irony unconsciously revealed in my voice. It was the first time I had dared to

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criticise my hero, even by an inflection of voice; yet he seemed hurt by it, not angry.

"I think," he said quietly, "it was not so much what he *said* to me as what he *showed* me, that influenced my life. Most of his arguments against a Supreme Intelligence left me cold; I have an instinctive belief in the Absolute which no Atheistic negation could ever sweep away. But he took me by the hand and showed me life, life in the dens of a great city, and—Clive—I thought I had stepped into Hell!

"Here, at home"—and Roy's eyes glanced over the garden, the flower-hidden house, and the flaming sunset sky,—"here it was easy to think well of life, to believe in God's love resting over all. There—ah, God, those lives! Lives of sordid sin, types of every degradation, creatures foul within and without! And yet—the pathos of it all! Even there, in those hovels where the sun never shines, even there, are creatures who hope—who love! It is these that haunt me, that would make me doubt—if I could doubt against my better instinct. . . . So many charities in London—so many noble lives given to the care of the poor—and yet such pitiful misery! Do you think I shall ever forget a boy, a large-eyed, shrunken little creature deformed by disease, who said to me one day—after a missionary had promised him a better world if he read the Bible—'Say, mister, '*Eaven is in the country*, ain't it?'"

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Roy was silent for a moment, and I found nothing to answer him, as, for the first time in my life, I stood face to face with the eternal problem of human misery.

"I can well understand," Roy continued after a while, "that apostles of the poor are daily found, men and women who freely give their wealth, their life, to those who want. . . . And I ask myself: Am I not the man to do it?"

A thrill of horror went through me at these words. In spite of my new-awakened pity for those who know of life but its shadows, I felt I would leave all the poor in London to starve, rather than see a genius like Roy sacrifice himself to their need. I worded my thoughts incoherently

"Roy, you shall not do it! Why, it would be madness! You are made for greater things—and you know it! Roy, you shall not!"

He turned to me with a quiet smile.

"If that were the sole reason, I think I should not hesitate. There can be no work greater than charity. Yes, it would be hard, it would be very hard, to renounce my ambition—yet I would do it—I think I would do it! But now I no longer know what is right, and this is what troubles me so. . . . These people need faith, living faith, to raise their lives. . . . And this I have lost!"

Roy was silent, and for the next few minutes we walked mutely side by side, Roy apparently in deep meditation, while I pondered over his words

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and his mood, and failed quite to understand either.

I had known Roy the student, Roy the athlete, Roy the inventor and future astronomer, Roy the dreamer of strange and vast dreams. But Roy the theologian — Roy the would-be missionary to the East End! My very soul rose in revolt at the idea.

I broke the silence by the most commonplace remark I could well have uttered.

"Don't you think, Roy," I asked, "that you are a bit—what shall I say?—morbid in this matter? You did not use to worry about these things in the old days, did you?"

"No," he answered, with the suspicion of a smile, "but then I was a child. You will grant that this may make some difference in one's thoughts — and one's faith. . . . But you see, Clive—I suppose I am by nature impatient—I cannot bear doubt, uncertainty, whether in great things or small. . . . And now I am in doubt. . . . My ambition is unchanged, but I wonder, often wonder, if we have a right to dream of the sun and the stars when there are women and little children who starve around us?"

I was silent, and Roy continued:

"I do not know, Clive, if the hopelessness of their life is not even more terrible than its poverty. . . . The poorest of the poor is rich when he hopes! But most of them live as we live

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in some stifling dream, dull, stupid, groping their way through life like children in the dark. . . . Yet we talk of rescue—of salvation! But what salvation—in the broadest sense of the word—do we offer them? We bring them our own doubts and disbeliefs, our own struggles and failures. Those poor little germs of soul that we have come to foster are torn between conflicting parties—Salvationists who, with fife and drum, cry: Come to Jesus and you are saved! Ritualists who say: Unless ye confess your sins to an ordained priest and receive absolution, ye cannot be admitted into the Church of the Elect. Atheists who declare: There is nothing but this life; God is a fable and Heaven a dream. . . .—Ah, if one could only give them the simple belief in a Christ—in a Friend—without theology, without the strife of Churches! . . . If one could only go to them and say: I know—I have seen:—Believe in Him, for He came and He loved. . . . If one could say this, *and be believed*!"

"But," I asked, hesitantly, and still fearful of an affirmative answer, "can you—will you say this?"

"I will say it when I can say it truthfully. Now, I have no faith to offer: only instincts—only dreams."

With these last half-whispered words ended Roy's confession, and I was left to wonder, in silence, at the change that had come over him. Many a time, during the days we spent together,

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did I allude to his work, seeking to reawaken—if indeed it needed reawakening—his old ambition ; but he became as reserved on the subject as if he had not opened his heart to me once in perfect self-abandonment.

In vain the stars shone in the immensities overhead ; in vain the young moon flooded the meadows with its silver-grey light ; in vain also did the toy models of the flying machine and the folding bridge look entreatingly at their creator from the height of their dust-covered shelf : astronomy and mechanics were alike forgotten while Roy was wading diligently in the deep waters of theological literature.

His mental standpoint I still failed to understand. To my very immature and unphilosophical mind it seemed that all the doubts and difficulties were of his own making, and would vanish at his command like evil dwarfs at a sign from the master. I had not sufficient penetration to see that one of the peculiar characteristics of my friend's nature was his need of absolute, mathematical certainty in all things, whether of the spiritual or of the material order. In the material world he knew that 3 is the cube root of 27, and that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles. In the spiritual world nothing short of an almost equal assurance would satisfy him.

The sight and close knowledge of evil and

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sorrow, revealed by the very man who started from these facts to deny a Supreme Intelligence, had shaken the simple belief he had received from his mother's lips and made his own without discussion and without doubt. Since then he had been walking in the road which all thinking minds must tread sooner or later, the road of conflict, often bitter unto death, between old instincts and new ideas—a conflict which was to end for Roy in the most magnificent victory over Time, Space, and Matter that the human mind has yet achieved.

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CHAPTER V

OLD FRIENDS

TWO months later I gaily set sail for India, little dreaming that seven years were to elapse before I returned to England and the little cottage by the sea where the happiest days of my boyhood had passed.

If this were the story of my own life, instead of my friend's, I might feel inclined to linger, in the leisurely way affected by autobiographers, over all the little events of my journey,—my arrival home, my meeting with the father and mother from whom I had been parted so long that they seemed almost strangers, my entrance into the local journalistic world under the patronage of an old friend of the family, my successes and failures in the career I had chosen.

If ever I write my memoirs—and at the present time who does not?—I may have some interesting revelations to make on the inner working of the Press in our great Indian Empire, and may even

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write one or two amusing chapters on the inimitable mixture of pathos and drollery that composed my daily life in the dusty little office of the *Subathoo Morning Mail.* But this is emphatically "the book of Roy," or, to be more accurate still, the book of Roy's discovery, and I must only figure in it as a secondary character, a witness, a faithful disciple who tells to the world the story of his master.

Let me then be brief as the soul of wit, and fly at lightning speed through the years that elapsed between my seventeenth and my twenty-fourth year,—from the day of my setting foot on Indian soil to the time when my father's death and my mother's second marriage forced my life into new and totally unforeseen channels.

In my father I lost a friend whose place in my existence I only fully realised when this place was left empty. With my mother I never recovered the ground lost by too long a separation. She had petted and spoiled her little son far beyond the limits of babyhood, but in the lanky, overgrown boy of seventeen, who returned to her after an absence of five years, she never seemed quite to recognise the sunny-haired, mutinous child of old. "You are so changed, Clive," she would say to me in a plaintive tone, "I sometimes wonder if you are really my son!"

After my father's sudden death—the result of a fall from horseback—we drew nearer to each other, my mother and I, than we had been since the

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days of my early childhood, and something of the familiarity and tenderness of the long ago came back into our life.

Our heart-intimacy lasted a year, and the year was almost a happy one. Then came the crushing blow—the news, told me by a friend, of my mother's secret marriage with Colonel Lacy, a man of evil reputation, whose name gossip had already associated with hers some time before my father's death. Mad with resentment and disgust, I left my work, my home, and turned my back on India without a last farewell to my mother.

From my work I parted without regret, for I had begun to weary of journalistic routine, and to feel the conviction, daily growing stronger, that a provincial Indian editorship was not to be my path to glory. I was beginning to rust, and the sensation is not pleasant at four-and-twenty. Yet, partly through fear of displeasing my father, who was naïvely proud of my editorial dignity, partly, I am afraid, through indolence and *laisser-aller*, I remained nearly six years in a career which had grown daily more distasteful.

Free at last to do as I chose—although the joys of freedom were dearly bought—I decided, like many another literary ne'er-do-well, to try my fortune in London, no longer as a journalist, but as a writer of fiction.

Happily for me, I had a patrimony sufficient to give me my daily bread—and a little more besides

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—without the help of my pen ; so after a twelve-month's rather aimless wanderings in the East, I resolved to lead for a while a Bohemian existence in the great city I knew so little of, observe my fellow-beings, and in various ways study life—which meant learning my trade. But before settling down to unsettled Bohemianism, I determined to see Roy. Alone in the world as I was now, his friendship acquired a new significance, and I remembered the flower-decked Jersey cottage as a new-old home where friendly faces were awaiting me.

"Clive, old fellow! Is it you in very truth?"

Ah, the old face, the familiar voice, how it gladdened me as I stood with my hand in Roy's, in the sunshine of a fair June morning! Poets have sung their sweetest rhapsodies on the delights of love and lovers' meeting. Who will sing of friendship and the joy there is when friend meets friend after a long absence, when hand presses hand in silent welcome?

Roy had aged during our separation. It was the same refined, intellectual face, the deep grey eyes, beautiful as a woman's, the subtle charm of voice and manner ; but he looked forty instead of twenty-six, and the hair on his temples was beginning to turn grey.

We decided to walk the distance between St Hélier harbour and *Estrella Lodge*, by the road

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we had so often trodden together in past years, when all the dreams of our boyhood accompanied us on the way.

One of my first questions was: "And your work, Roy? What is it now? Astronomy—invention—theology? Why would you never tell me anything in your letters?"

He smiled, but did not immediately answer me.

"I am working at some machines at present," he replied evasively. "I hope to have done my work ere long."

"Why, is it a secret?" I asked, wondering at the reticence in his manner.

"For the present, yes."

"A secret for everyone—or only for me?"

He gave me a reproachful glance.

"Is this kind? You might have guessed, Clive, that one of my greatest pleasures would be to tell you everything! But until I have succeeded—succeeded beyond all possibility of failure—it must remain a secret for everyone, save for my sister, and for the man whose money has helped to build the machines."

"Are they very costly, then?"

"Nearly £40,000 have already been spent."

My wonder increased at these figures, my curiosity also.

"And you will soon be able to tell me the great secret?"

"I hope so,—yes!"

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"And so your sister——?"

"Yes, she knows everything, and has helped me in more ways than I can tell. She has a splendid head for figures, and has been invaluable to me as a secretary."

"Indeed!"

The vision of the shy, pale-faced little girl of old, developed into a rigid blue-stocking, was not pleasant, and I felt ill prepared to like Estrella the woman better than I had liked Estrella the child.

We soon came in view of the cottage, hiding as of yore in a veritable bower of fuchsias and roses:

"The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves."

A dignified little maid answered our knock, and informed us that Mrs Staunton and Miss Staunton were out on the lawn; so, following her, we crossed the hall and, through the small conservatory at the back of the house, passed into the garden.

Under the old pear-tree, where Roy and I, perched on its highest branches, had spent many happy hours, sat Mrs Staunton, alert and youthful-looking as ever under her silvery hair; by her side stood a graceful, girlish figure clad in pure white, and crowned with the sunshine that filtered through the leaves.

"Well, mother," Roy gaily exclaimed as we appeared on the lawn, "here is our wanderer returned at last!"

"And right welcome he is," smiled the little lady as she rose to greet me. "Estrella, my dear—

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Must I introduce you, Mr Delafield, or do you remember old friends?"

So this was, in very truth, Roy's sister—the timid little thing of bygone days, now her brother's learned secretary and helpmate? So totally different was she, both from my remembrance of the child and my anticipation of the woman, that I revealed my surprise in the unwilling exclamation: "Estrella!" Then, immediately recovering myself: "I beg your pardon, Miss Staunton," I hastened to add, not without some embarrassment.

She looked into my eyes and smiled. "Roy and I always speak of you as Clive," she said simply.

And then I knew we should be friends.

"What do you think of Estrella?" Roy asked me that evening as we strolled on the cliffs in the clear moonlight.

I hesitated for a moment, finding it difficult to answer. At last I said, bluntly: "I think you are a lucky dog to have her for a sister!"

"Ah, I am glad you like her! I have always thought her the dearest old girl in the world, but you two were not particularly good friends, were you, some years ago? Of course she was only a child then, and very shy with strangers, still, sometimes a feeling like this remains. . . . I am glad you like her," he added once more in a hearty tone.

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"I hope she will like me," I said.

"Oh, I am certain she will," he exclaimed, with a brother's characteristic assurance on the subject of his sister's feelings. "You will soon be the best of friends!"

After some minutes' silence he added pensively:

"You must make the most of her friendship while it lasts, for I am afraid she will not be with us much longer."

"What do you mean?" I asked quickly.

"Oh, there is one of our cousins in Madrid who has fallen head over ears in love with her! She does not dislike him, though she will not say *yes*. But mother has set her heart on the marriage, and I believe he is coming to England next week."

I then learnt that Estrella had lately visited Spain, where she had been in turn the guest of all her noble relatives: her great-uncle the Marqués de los Angelos, Prime Minister under the reign of Isabella; her cousin Carlota-Teresa, wife of the Spanish ambassador at Lisbon; her godfather, the Archbishop of Barcelona—and I know not how many more great personages with coat-of-arms and historical names. At the house of one of these lofty ones she had met her second cousin Gilberto, a brilliant young attaché, who fell in love with her on the first day of their meeting, wrote an amorous sonnet to her eyebrows on the second, and would probably have attempted to carry her off on the third, had her balcony been of a convenient height,

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and the period the sixteenth instead of the twentieth century.

Estrella had merely been amused by the boy's vagaries—they were nearly of the same age, so that she naturally adopted towards him the elder-sisterly attitude so dear to woman's heart,—but the boy was apparently in deep earnest. He had perforce been absent from Madrid at the time Estrella started on her homeward journey, and his despair on hearing of her departure almost attained the height of pure tragedy. On her side, Estrella had mentioned him to her mother as a foolish but rather amiable youth who had played at being in love with her. But when, some days after her return, a letter came from the old Duke of Valencia, Gilberto's grandfather and guardian, ceremoniously asking Miss Staunton's hand for Don Gilberto de Alta-Villa y Valledras, then the "make-believe of love" suddenly assumed a more serious character—at least in Mrs Staunton's eyes.

The little lady was on almost every subject the embodiment of perfect good sense; but what mother does not build castles in the air, castles of gold and precious stones, for her children to dwell in? For herself, she had willingly renounced the doubtful glories of court life, and chosen happy obscurity with the man she loved; yet for Estrella she dreamt of a title, a coronet, and a fortune out of a fairy tale. In spite of her daughter's entreaties, she had returned so indefinite

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and undecided an answer to the Duke of Valencia's letter, that Gilberto announced his intention of coming to England without delay to plead his suit.

So this was the situation at *Estrella Lodge* as I gathered it from Roy's rather disconnected confidences. Mrs Staunton was awaiting, with childlike impatience, her young cousin's arrival,—Estrella said little on the subject, but thought the more, Roy decided,—while Roy himself was on the verge of a discovery that would revolutionise the world and human thought.

Philosophy and lovers' vows — science and amorous intrigue. . . . It was sufficient to interest the most *blasé* student of humanity, even had there not been the deep grey eyes of Roy's little secretary. . . .

Verily, there was promise in *Estrella Lodge.*

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CHAPTER VI

WHEN HEARTS ARE YOUNG

"MAY I come in?" I asked the next morning as I knocked at the door of Roy's study.

In a moment Roy himself had opened the door and was standing before me with an amused smile on his lips.

"Don't imagine this to be an alchemist's den, Clive, where the philosopher's stone is in preparation, and none but the elect may enter. Come in and out as you like, as you used to do in the old days."

"Come in and out as I like?" I repeated, with some astonishment. "Why, what is to become of your great secret if you grant me the franchise of your study?"

The smile deepened on Roy's face.

"Do you see anything in here that helps you to the discovery?" he asked laughingly.

I glanced around the familiar room, square, low-ceilinged, with a large French window opening out

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on the lawn. It looked in almost every detail as it had looked seven years ago, when the gliding boat, the flying machine, and other youthful inventions had been laid aside in the pursuit of theology. The works of the Fathers of the Church were in their old place on the book-lined walls, and in their old place also were the toy models of Roy's early inventions.

It was difficult to tell which one of the two rival parties was at present in the ascendant: Science or Theology. Yet—perhaps it was a mere fancy—it seemed to me that both the *Apologia* of S. Justinus and the *Summa* of S. Thomas Aquinas had the stiff appearance of unread books, while over the wings of the flying machine hung a certain forlornness that betrayed equal neglect.

I looked at Roy inquiringly.

"I only write here," he explained, reading the question in my eyes. "My machines are elsewhere."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; for the simple reason that neither this room nor this house would contain them."

"So gigantic——?"

Roy led me to the window and pointed towards the east. At a distance of about three hundred yards, rising far above the tallest trees in the garden, a glass roof, resembling in shape the cupola of an observatory, glittered in the rays of the morning sun.

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"My machines are there," said Roy.

I confess that at this sight my curiosity became almost ungovernable; yet I knew questions were useless. In his own good time Roy would tell me everything, and until then I must possess my soul in patience.

I turned from the window with a restless sigh.

"Believe me, Clive," Roy said suddenly, as he slipped his arm through mine in the old familiar gesture, "I hate keeping it secret from you, but I am in honour bound not to reveal my invention until it is completed. I promised it to Lord Vynne—the man without whose help I could have done nothing. I daresay you know him by reputation? His fortune exceeds three millions, and I believe he would joyfully spend it to the last penny in the cause of science. Ah, his enthusiasm is good to behold! By the way, it was Estrella who brought us together. It is wonderful what a help the little girl has been!"

"But she is in your confidence, is she not?"

"Yes, and the fun of it is that Vynne himself told her! He had made me promise to tell no one, absolutely no one, for he lives in mortal fear that somebody will steal my invention; but when he discovered what a clever girl Estrella is, he made an exception in her favour. So now we are three," Roy added with a smile, "to hold the dread secret."

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"But your mother——" I began with some hesitation.

Instantly Roy's face clouded.

"Mother knows nothing, but guesses a little, and worries a great deal. As you may well imagine, I have never felt any inclination to cry my discovery on the housetops, but sometimes it has been almost more than I could bear to keep it a secret from her, to see the poor little woman peering furtively into every corner of my study, looking at me so piteously at times, as if she would read the secret in my eyes. . . . It will be a great, a glad relief, to tell her all! I do believe she half guesses the truth: She must remember——"

He ceased abruptly—and I also tried to remember—and did remember.

. . . . . .

Roy was not mistaken in thinking that his mother fretted over his secret. I had been at *Estrella Lodge* a few days only, when one morning, as the old lady and I sat together in the garden—Estrella was working in her brother's study—she opened her heart to me.

"Mr Delafield, what do you think of Roy?"

I knew the simple question was fraught with anxious meaning, and hesitated to answer.

"He is very busy," I replied at last lamely.

"Busy? Yes, and you little know to what extent! At present he is living more normally, but all this last winter he worked night and day—

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literally night and day! I thought his mind must give way at last: his face was terrible to see in the morning! Have you noticed that his hair is turning grey?"

"Yes, a little——"

"And he is only twenty-six!—the age of youth, of joy, of love! And he gives his life to those machines—ah, God!—as if they were idols demanding the sacrifice of a human life!"

"He tells me his work will soon be done," I remarked reassuringly.

For a moment Mrs Staunton looked at me in silence, as if trying to read my thoughts.

"Yes," she said at last in a low voice, "so he tells me—and it were time it ended! For nearly nine years has he worked at this thing, and when it is completed, when the work is accomplished, then—the most terrible of all will come to pass!"

I looked at Mrs Staunton in bewilderment. She was very white, and her hands trembled in her lap.

"No," she continued, "the past is nothing to the anguish that the future holds. I have seen my only son lose his youth before my eyes, live away from me in a world of his own, where I cannot follow; but the worst is yet to come! I shall see—I shall see——"

The old lady broke down completely and hid her face in her hands. I was deeply moved, yet found no word of comfort.

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After a time she lifted her eyes, dim with unshed tears, and said slowly: "You, Mr Delafield, you who are his friend, his oldest and best friend, can it be you have formed no idea of his secret?"

I hesitated for a moment.

"The other day," I answered, "after we had a long talk together, Roy and I, I imagined—I remembered—a conversation, years ago.—But it is impossible, quite impossible,—only an absurd idea of mine."

"Will you tell me what this conversation was, and what is your idea?" Mrs Staunton asked in her low, sad voice.

"Oh, ever so long ago, when we were boys, we went to hear a lecture on astronomy, here, at St Hélier. Perhaps you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, as we walked home,—Roy was fired with enthusiasm on the subject, you know—we talked of all those wonders—the planets and the stars—and Roy spoke of the possibility of communication between ourselves and other worlds. He declared quite seriously that it could be done, and said—I remember his very words—*Perhaps I shall be the man to do it.* But of course this means nothing: I was foolish to think of it for one moment! Roy is too sensible to waste his intelligence on a problem no human mind can ever solve."

"He has solved it," said Mrs Staunton quietly.

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I started from my seat and looked at the old lady in a bewilderment too great for words.

"Yes," she continued, still in the same low, trembling voice, "I fear he has succeeded; although I have prayed, prayed till my knees were worn, that he might fail! It sounds horrible, does it not? A mother praying for her son's failure—the failure of his life-work! It is sinful perhaps, but ah!—God who gave me my son will not hold me guilty if I erred in my prayer. . . . I have only this one son, my Royal, and I shall see him—no, this is the agony!—I shall not see him die, I shall not know the moment, nor the manner of his death. . . . I shall know nothing, see nothing, hear nothing. . . . They tell us Creation is infinite—I was taught differently in my Catechism—but if it is, then in all these multitudes of worlds, where shall I seek my son?"

I found my voice at last, to murmur: "But it cannot be! You must be mistaken: it is impossible, impossible, impossible!"

I seemed to derive a vague sense of comfort from the mere repetition of the word.

"God grant it be! Sometimes I, also, say it cannot be, or think it is all a dream, an evil dream! Oh, am not always living in this fear, else I should have gone mad! There are moments when I think I am mistaken. I am not clever. I know nothing of science. But I am his mother: This gives me knowledge—and power! He believes I suspect nothing. . . . I have remembered every

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word, every look! And then, I have seen drawings, once, in his study. . . . No, I cannot be mistaken—but he may fail—he may fail—and it is my only hope!"

. . . . . .

I saw little of Roy that day. In spite of his mother's assertion that he was working in a more normal way than he had done for many months past, his mode of life still appeared to me as unconventional and erratic as it well could be. Away from home the greater part of the day, locked up—generally with Lord Vynne, sometimes with Estrella—in the mysterious glass house, indulging in no pleasure or relaxation, denying himself even the mental and bodily refreshment of a walk over the cliffs, subsisting on a diet of fruit and biscuits which an anchorite might have partaken of without sin, Roy was, in my eyes at least, as thoroughly abnormal as any genius has a right to be.

Deprived of Roy's society, I found the most delightful of substitutes in Roy's sister. Brought up in the intimacy of home-life by a mother who was old-fashioned in the best sense of the word, having never left, save for her six weeks' visit to Spain, the seclusion of her country home, Estrella Staunton was, in spite of all her cleverness and knowledge, as simple and fresh as daisies in the field.

We were together a great deal in those days. Mrs Staunton had been a semi-invalid for the past

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"My love grew strong and glad within me"

Around a Distant Star

To face p. 67

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two years, and rarely went further than her favourite seat on the lawn, or the little summer-house at the end of the garden. Left to ourselves, Estrella and I roamed at will all over the Island, as we had once roamed—Roy and I—when Estrella was a child in pinafores, who was not allowed to follow us in our great expeditions, because she was "only a girl," and could not walk as far, or as fast, as the boys. Only a girl! Only a girl still,—a small, slender little thing with the heart of a woman and the mind of a man.

I had loved her from the first day of our meeting, when she stood by her mother's side in the garden, bare-headed in the sunshine, with a welcome on her lips and a greeting in her eyes. Since then I had daily breathed her charm, as one breathes the fragrance of a flower. . . . And my love grew strong and glad within me.

It was a word spoken by Estrella to her mother and accidentally overheard, that decided my destiny. One evening I sat alone in the garden, smoking a cigarette on the lawn, just outside the windows of Roy's study. The peace of a beautiful summer night was slowly falling over the hills, hushing the song of birds and bees. I was dreaming of Estrella, when I heard her voice in the room behind me. It had a ring of decision—almost authority—that was not habitual to it.

"No, mother," she was saying in a low, firm tone, "if Gilberto only comes, as he says, to obtain

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my consent, it is not right that we should let him come! And this is why I have written——"

"But, Estrella," pleaded the old lady, "you may still change your mind?"

"Never, mother," came the quick, decisive reply, "I shall not change my mind, and—I cannot marry a man I do not love."

As these last words were spoken I rose hastily to make my presence known, and appeared at the French window just as Estrella herself was coming out on the lawn.

We stood face to face and silent for a moment. I thought I read confusion in her eyes; she must have read happiness in mine, for she blushed deeply under my glance.

Mrs Staunton was the first to break the silence.

"Oh, were you out there, Mr Delafield? A lovely evening, is it not—but rather chilly. Estrella, dear, I left my shawl in the summer-house."

Immediately Estrella darted past me with quite unnecessary haste, and I, without a word of apology to Mrs Staunton—who was rather punctilious in little matters of etiquette—turned my back on the old lady and followed Estrella down the lawn.

The distance from the house to the end of the garden was not very great, yet we were both curiously out of breath as we reached, almost together, the door of the summer-house. Mrs Staunton's mantilla was there, partly fallen from the low wicker chair where the old lady had been

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sitting. How well I remember it! It was a white knitted thing, soft to the touch, with long fringes of wool, and a faint perfume of iris lingering in its folds. Still in a violent hurry, Estrella ran into the house, picked up the shawl, and was about to run away with it, when I detained her, laying my hand on her arm. As I did so, our eyes met, and—— Surely never was wooing so swift and silent as mine! I called her by name: "Estrella!" And it was all. She understood. There was no need of words; and in the old familiar garden where the shadows began to fall, we mutely plighted our troth.

Meanwhile, Mrs Staunton patiently awaited her shawl!

. . . . . .

We returned to the study at last, looking, I have no doubt, the picture of guilt—and happiness—and carrying the precious mantilla between us, like some priceless relic of bygone days.

Mrs Staunton was sitting by the French window, and saw us coming. There was a puzzled expression on her face.

"What a long time you have been, Estrella! Did you not find the shawl at once?"

Estrella blushed and looked at me. I looked at Estrella, then at Mrs Staunton, and—well, I did not blush, but I smiled, and the smile betrayed me. In another moment Mrs Staunton had understood,

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and gave a little cry of dismay. It was only the disappointment of an instant, the pang we all feel when our castles-in-the-air—so beautiful, so precious, so carefully built—crumble to dust before our eyes. In that one moment the little lady bade a reluctant farewell to titles and coronets and the princely fortune she had dreamt of. But she knew me of old, and, I believe, liked me well. I was Roy's best friend, and, wonderful as it might appear, I was the man of Estrella's choice; so after the first movement of unconscious regret, she accepted the inevitable with very good grace, perhaps remembering that in her own life love had come first—wealth and wisdom afterwards.

She held out her hands to us both.

"My dear children——" she began, and her voice ended in a little sob of pleasure and pain.

And thus our courtship, begun in silence, was in silence consecrated.

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CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

THE great day came at last: the day when hidden things were to be revealed and mysteries made clear—the day Roy was to speak and tell us his secret.

"Will you come to the workroom this evening, Clive, between nine and ten?"

That was all he said, but I understood the promise his words implied, and my heart beat quicker at the thought.

I had never yet entered the mysterious house with the glass dome that glittered so temptingly in the near distance; and in spite of Estrella's repeated assurances that it merely looked, inside, like an observatory and engine-room combined, I could not divest myself of the idea that wonderful sights, hitherto unknown to earth, would greet me on my entrance. It was with a thrill of intense emotion that I stood at the appointed hour before the door which had always remained so obstinately closed

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to me and all the world. Roy himself answered my knock.

It needed but a glance at his face to show me I had not come in vain : He was transfigured, and the holy joy of work accomplished shone in his eyes.

Together we entered the vast hall, brilliantly lighted by hundreds of electric lamps that formed a luminous frieze beneath the glass dome. Save for this dazzling illumination, Estrella's description was correct : an observatory and electrical engine-room combined.

It looked little more, save for the towering shape of a huge cylinder in brilliant aluminium, that rested on a light structure of iron, and resembled nothing so much as a gigantic bomb, ready to leap into space.

On one side of it stood a large equatorial and two medium-sized telescopes ; on the other were numerous machines, electrical machines to all appearance, yet with a something unfamiliar in the details of their structure that at once arrested my attention.

For some moments I gazed about me curiously, striving to read the secret of Roy's discovery ; then I turned to Roy with a question on my lips. He stood by my side, yet far away from me, his eyes lost in an inward vision. I had not seen this rapt expression on his face since that day of his boyhood when for the first time the great

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astronomical truths were revealed to him. As I had seen him at Professor Tweed's lecture, bending eagerly forward with clasped hands and trembling lips, so he stood by me now, large-eyed and pale as prophets are when the fire burns within them.

My earnest glance called him back from his dream. He remembered my presence and looked at me with a smile.

"Come!" he said suddenly.

He took me by the hand and led me outside, into the fragrant coolness of the garden. The night-flowering plants shone starry white in the rays of the young moon and burdened the air with their strong, voluptuous scent—a scent which suggested far-away bowers in some unknown fairyland.

Above us the stars filled the solitudes of space with throbbing life.

"Look at these, Clive," Roy said, as he lifted his eyes to the immensities overhead. "Look at those stars, sprinkled like grains of sand on the shores of eternity. . . . Every one is a world—nay, every one is the centre of a multitude of worlds, the sun of a planetary system probably far more beautiful than our own! . . . Can you, Clive, can anyone see them, and not burn with a passion for knowledge—for near knowledge? Does it satisfy you to know their distance, their orbits, their velocity? No; we want to know them as man knows man—we long to meet them as friend

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meets friend, as brother hails brother. . . . We want to know them as God knows them, He who created them, and reads the secret of their destiny as He reads the secret of every human heart. . . . Can you see them, Clive, there above us, calling to us in their eternal silence, and not feel as if wings were unfolding within you? As if nothing, no, nothing in infinite creation could keep you from flying towards them as the eagle to the sun? . . . Clive, I shall do it. . . . I am called. . . . By God's will I shall do it! . . . It *is* done, Clive, all is ready. . . . To-morrow, to-day, I might start! . . . Ah, Clive! to possess my dream at last: to be as a soul freed from Time and Space, and journey among the stars! . . . And then," he added in a lower voice, "to know the truth about him!"

I failed to grasp the meaning of these last words, but Roy's manner as he spoke them, more to himself than to me, forbade any question. Besides, the momentary curiosity they had aroused was soon lost in the far greater wonder excited by Roy's revelation.

"You have, then, solved the problem of inter-planetary communication?" I asked in an awed whisper.

He smiled. "Inter-planetary, yes, — and inter-stellar."

"Inter-stellar?" I repeated with deepening wonder.

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"Yes! Come back to the workroom, Clive, and I will tell you everything."

I followed him into the house. The night was warm, but several open windows gave a pleasant coolness to the great hall. Roy lifted a portière close to the entrance and showed me into a little sanctum littered with papers and plans of every description, and crowded with miniature models of machinery. He removed a heap of manuscripts from the only visible chair, to which he courteously invited me, while he found for himself a seat on a corner of the great desk.

"You know, Clive," he began—and I noticed at his first words that the fiery enthusiasm of a moment ago had subsided into a calmer mood—"you know I have long dreamt of journeying into space, from planet to planet, from star to star. . . . Do you remember Professor Tweed's lecture? And our conversation as we walked home? But even that was not the beginning. . . . I cannot recall the moment when the idea, the instinct, first came to me; but the professor's lecture revealed me to myself. What had been a dream—vague, intangible—became a reality, the one reality of my life.

"Henceforward the idea never left me. I lived with it, in it, through it. . . . Do you know, Clive, how dear a thought may become—how it cleaves to us, seeming to become our very flesh—how it winds itself about our heart, our brain, our soul? Once

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—only once—did another thought step between us twain and strive to separate us. The pain was well-nigh intolerable! Perhaps you remember—— But of this I will speak later on."

He was silent and thoughtful for some moments, then continued:

"You are aware, Clive, that our cleverest men of science are at present only learning to read in the great book of Nature. You know that we are surrounded by tremendous, inconceivable forces —some known, many unknown—and that the unknown ones are the greater. In spite of the magnificent discoveries of late years, we are still, relatively to the forces of Nature, in the situation so beautifully described by Newton, of children gathering pebbles on the sea-shore, while the immense ocean of truth lies unexplored before us. We talk glibly of light, heat, electricity, and to the mind untrained in scientific thought it seems as if nothing could be simpler or more commonplace than these daily manifestations. It takes us many years to learn that the apparently simple phenomenon of light is as great a mystery as any that may confront the human mind,—that in the heaven above or in the earth below an unanswerable question meets us at every step. Yes," continued Roy meditatively, "it takes us many years to learn that, whether the microscope reveals the wonderful cell-structure of a blade of grass, or the telescope discovers the marvels of double and

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treble stars, we are ever face to face with a mystery, as inscrutable in the infinitely small as in the infinitely great.

"But I am wandering from my subject," he added with a smile. "You must not let me do it, Clive!

"Well, for many years I felt that, could we but discover it, there must be in nature a force that would solve the problem of inter-planetary—even of inter-stellar — communication. After all, it resolves itself into a mere question of velocity. If we can obtain a velocity so great as to overcome the earth's gravity, the first and most difficult part of the problem is solved. By the way, are you aware that this question, seemingly so modern, is in reality a very ancient one?"

"Is it?" I asked with much surprise.

"Why, yes, ancient and almost commonplace! Already among the Romans of the second century it appears that stories of visits to other worlds were as plentiful as daisies in a summer meadow! And since then, from Lucian to Dante, from Ariosto to Swedenborg, from Cyrano de Bergerac to Edgar Poe, what a long line of thinkers who have taken their flight into heavenly spaces! In modern times, starting from Jules Verne's delightful journey to the Moon, how many searchers after novelty have built more or less fantastic tales on an astronomical basis? Indeed, in our own age, so distinctly scientific even in its

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ideals, astronomical fiction is certain to become popular, until the inevitable reaction sets in, and people begin to weary of planetary sensationalism."

"When they shall return, let us hope, with a sigh of relief to some simple idyl of this world," I added. "But, Roy, I beg you, satisfy my curiosity! What about your great invention?"

"Have one moment's patience, Clive! I am coming to the point, although I seem to be wandering from my subject; for it is Fiction that has once more shown the way to Science, and led her to this, the greatest of all discoveries!"

"Do you mean it, Roy?" I could not help exclaiming in amazed delight.

"I mean it. When Jules Verne wrote his clever little book, *De la Terre à la Lune*, he hit upon the right, the only, method of solving the problem. The simple idea of the cannon and the cannon-ball, fantastic as it may appear, is in reality the true principle of inter-planetary communication. All the more or less extraordinary air-boats invented by modern novelists are, and probably for ever will be, impracticable. I cannot pretend to say what the science of the future may or may not do, but I doubt that a machine which can ascend and descend at will, like a balloon, augment or moderate its speed, draw near to the planets, and even to the sun, without falling into them, and so forth, and that *in ethereal space*, will ever exist outside its creator's imagination.

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"But the principle of the cannon and the cannon-ball is undoubtedly the right one. Reduced to its simplest expression, the problem stands thus: Build a dynamo that will generate a velocity of about one mile per second; construct an air-ship that will be projected by this dynamo as a stone is flung from a catapult—or a cannon-ball out of a cannon, to keep to the old simile; form the angle of the lines of motion so that the air-ship will fall in a straight line on a certain star, planet, or satellite—and the problem is solved."

"It sounds wonderfully easy!" I remarked, with a smile.

"In a way it *is* easy," replied Roy, "yet for nearly seven years I vainly sought for a power that would generate a velocity, not of one mile a second, but a velocity a hundred, a thousand, a million times greater. A velocity of one mile per second would free us from the Earth's attraction only to land us either on the Moon or on Mars, or, more probably still, on the sun. Naturally," Roy added with a gleam of fun, "I have not worked nine years of my life to end by falling on the sun like a moth in a flame; and I confess that my ambition goes farther than the Moon or Mars, or any of the planets of our system."

"Roy!" I exclaimed in incredulous wonderment.

"Stay! Do not interrupt me, Clive, or you will have to complain of another digression. . . .

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For seven years I sought this power—and at last I have discovered it."

"And it is——?"

"I call it a new mode of electro-magnetism, but its real nature is as yet a mystery. It *is* electricity, but an electricity that will accomplish wonders hitherto unknown to science.

"You know that light and electricity possess the two greatest known velocities, light travelling at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles in a second, and electricity with nearly double that velocity, namely, two hundred and eighty-eight thousand miles in a second.

"I cannot now understand why I was so unwise as to waste nearly five years in useless experiments on light rays, at the same time neglecting electricity with its tremendous hidden forces. You are aware that the motive power of light has but lately been demonstrated, but years before this discovery I felt convinced that the *latent* energy of light-waves could be transformed into *potential* energy. Thus I experimented with sun rays, cathode rays, X rays—and failed continually."

"And yet you did not despair of success?"

Roy looked at me with wondering eyes.

"Despair of success?" he repeated slowly. "No, never: I knew I should succeed."

His faith left me silent, and after a moment he continued:

"One night, after I had worked for many hours

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on some experiment that proved fruitless, when I was nearer discouragement than I had ever known myself to be, two words flashed through my brain like a command: *Positive—Negative.* I mused over them for a while, but failed to discover any meaning that bore on the problem. Positive and negative electricity? Was the force I was seeking hidden between the two poles of an electric battery? I must have been singularly stupid—or overworked—at the time, for I pondered and pondered, yet saw no light.

"Eighteen months later I was reading an account of Nikola Tesla's wonderful experiments before the London Royal Society. You know that with his new dynamo—and the help of special condensers—he is able to obtain an electric current *fifteen thousand times* more powerful than any hitherto known. What a leap, this, in the science of electricity! Instead of one hundred alternations in a second, Tesla multiplies them to over one million five hundred thousand per second!

"The strangest part of this new electricity—if one may call it so—is that while an ordinary current of two thousand volts, or even less, will kill a man, a current of fifty thousand volts, as produced by Tesla's dynamo, not only causes no shock, but cannot even be felt, so that flashes of lightning become mere toys in the experimenter's hands! And this tremendous force—that will pass,

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unfelt, through a man, as easily as a wave of light passes through a sheet of glass—this force needs no wire for its transmission, but acts at a distance across space, free and untrammelled as a ray of sunshine.

"It was while reading the description of these experiments that I received my inspiration—I can call it by no other name—for without any effort of my own, without conscious thought even, I saw before me the problem and its solution : I knew I must discover a mode of electricity as far exceeding Tesla's in power as Tesla's exceeds ordinary electricity. Positive—negative ! I understood the words at last. Positive electricity that attracts negative and repels positive electricity. . . . Positive electricity acting as motive power on itself. . . . This was the secret !

"How it was, I do not know, but the moment the idea flashed through my mind I knew the problem was solved. In an inward vision I saw, as clearly as I see it now, every difficulty overcome, every obstacle removed. The years of striving were past, and I touched the goal."

"But, Roy," I ventured to say hesitantly, "I do not at all understand—yet——"

"No, of course you do not !" laughed Roy, his manner recovering as if by enchantment the light-hearted vivacity of old. "You cannot understand, for as yet I have explained nothing ! But look at this model—or rather, no," he added,

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rising, "let us study the machines themselves, and all will be made clear to you."

"I am not quite certain of that," I replied doubtfully, as I followed him into the hall; "for, to tell you the truth, Roy, I am feeling more bewildered with every word you utter!"

"Well, look at this air-boat, and then at this dynamo, and you will grasp the principle in a moment.

"This," he continued, pointing to the large conico-cylindrical shape that towered above all the other machines, "this is my air-boat—and that," he added, with a glance towards a small, curiously-shaped dynamo, "generates the motive power that will launch it into space. In other words, here is my cannon-ball, and there is my cannon. From that machine will start a special electro-magnetic current possessing a velocity which will exceed nearly two thousand times that of light—a velocity which can be graduated from one hundred million to over three hundred million of miles a second."

I felt my brain reel at those figures.

"It does seem an inconceivable velocity, does it not?" added Roy, seeing my amazement. "And it *is* inconceivable—but so are all the forces of nature. We cannot conceive the rapidity of the etheric vibrations which produce light, although science tells us that in the red colour it is over four hundred and fifty trillion, in the violet

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over seven hundred trillion of undulations in one second! . . . All is inconceivable, all is tremendous in nature.

"This, then," he continued after a moment's silence, "is my motive power, and its discovery was the first step towards the solution of the problem. The next step was the construction of an air-boat—or let us simply call it a projectile, for the word *boat* is misleading—on which the electric current would act as the catapult acts on a stone. Of course you remember the first principle of electric science,—that while bodies charged with opposite kinds of electricity attract one another, those charged with the same kind of electricity repel one another. This principle holds good—in a measure—with regard to this new mode of electro-magnetism which I have discovered. I will not worry you, now, with technical details; but, briefly, let me tell you this, that its peculiar mode of action has enabled me to base all my work on the dual principle of electric attraction and repulsion. My current will be one of positive electricity; a wire net, charged, also, with positive electricity, will envelop the base of my projectile, which will thus be caught in, yet perpetually repelled by, the current, flying before it, as it were, like chaff before the wind."

The truth slowly dawned upon me.

"I see! I understand!" I exclaimed excitedly. "It is simple—beautifully simple! But, Roy, is

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it possible? Is it real? Is it—can it be—anything beyond a dream?"

Roy smiled quietly.

"Vynne and I have made repeated experiments with the small model—and so far every experiment has been a success."

For some moments I stared at my friend in a wonder too great for words. Hitherto I had looked at his work through a haze. It had been something dim, visionary—the dream of an enthusiast who, like many another dreamer, madly attempted to scale the heavens. And lo! before my eyes the mist cleared, the vision became distinct, and the dream a reality. It was possible, then, this wildest of all impossibilities? Man was not forever tied to his little square of earth?—not forever condemned to live in the midst of wonders eternally remote—to bask in the rays of the sun and never fathom its mystery—to live under the silent stars and never behold them face to face? Truly, the visions of prophets had come to pass!—the heavens were to be opened to the human gaze, and human thoughts, like angels, would pass from world to world.

I gazed at Roy as he stood by one of the large dynamos, looking wonderfully small and frail by the side of it—a human atom which the least part of the great machine might easily have crushed,—yet, in spite of his attenuated frame, his sunken eyes, his hair bleached by ceaseless work, appear-

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ing so magnificent in the royalty of his all-conquering genius, that my soul bowed before him and did him homage, as a subject before his sovereign.

"Roy," I said at last, "am I awake—or dreaming? Am I asleep, and shall I presently open my eyes and wonder at my dreams? You have solved this problem—you, Roy—you! . . . And you will start on a journey to the planets?"

"No," answered Roy, "not to the planets."

"Then——?"

"To the confines of the Universe."

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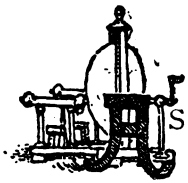
CHAPTER VIII

A DISTANT PLANET



AS Roy spoke these last words with a quiet smile, a cold shadow of doubt fell over my enthusiasm. To the confines of the Universe! Man, insect of a day, attached to his little planet, itself a mere grain of sand in the ocean of space,—man to talk of the confines of the Universe as of a mere resting-place on a celestial journey! A voyage to the Moon—well, it did not appear quite impossible, and already popular fiction had made the idea familiar. A journey to the nearest planets, to Venus, or Mars—even that, with a little effort of imagination, did not seem utterly unrealisable. But to pass beyond the farthest planets of our system, to traverse the unfathomable deserts of space, to land on some distant star, trillions of miles away. . . ! Again the double-edged question flashed through my mind: Genius—or madness?

Roy read the doubt in my eyes.

"I am not mad, Clive, although I may seem so.

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With the speed I have obtained, distance no longer exists. As my electric current—and with it the air-boat—will travel through space with a velocity nearly two thousand times superior to that of light, in a little over a twelvemonth from the date of my leaving Earth I shall land on a planet situate at a distance of no less than eleven thousand five hundred trillions of miles."

"And what planet is this?" I asked, trying hard not to feel myself going mad.

"Come to the telescope," said Roy, "and I will show you the sun around which it revolves—for it is a star of the eleventh magnitude, invisible to the naked eye."

Like a man in a dream I followed him to the other side of the hall, where stood the two telescopes and the great equatorial. At a sign from Roy I mechanically took my stand before one of the instruments, while, with a few dexterous movements, he placed it in position.

I looked, and in the field of vision appeared a small white star, a mere point of light in the dark immensities.

"This," said Roy, "is a sun far larger and more luminous than our own, and the centre of a system incomparably more magnificent. Twenty-five great planets gravitate around the Sun-king, each one accompanied in its course by a train of satellites. This system is at a distance of over eleven quatrillions, five hundred trillions of miles."

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I stared at Roy in speechless amazement; then, finding my voice at last: "But, Roy," I said, "how can you know—how can you tell? This star, this sun, is only just visible with a powerful telescope, yet you talk of its planetary system as if you had seen every planet, every moon——"

"I have seen them," said Roy.

"With the second sight?" I asked quite seriously, and indeed prepared for any wonder that Roy might reveal.

"No; simply with a telescope of my invention."

"A telescope——?"

"Whose power exceeds that of the greatest equatorials by far more than these exceed the unaided human sight."

Once more I could only say the one word: "Roy!" and be silent, and wonder if I were not in a dream.

"Yes," continued Roy, with his quiet, happy smile, "this was my third discovery—the third and last step towards the completion of my work. I had invented a dynamo that would generate a velocity two thousand times superior to that of light. I had constructed an air-boat which, placed in the way of the electric current projected by this dynamo, would participate in its velocity, and travel with it through space at the rate of over three hundred million miles in a second. But my work was still incomplete. For instance, in less than sixteen hours I could cross the twenty billions, two

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hundred millions of miles that separate us from the nearest star, Alpha Centauri ; but where should I land? On the star itself? Every star is a sun—every sun is a world in conflagration ! Were my projectile built of treble walls of iron, it would be reduced to vapour like a drop of water in a furnace, long before it came in contact with the star. One thing only was possible :—to direct my electric current towards one of the invisible planets of its system. To do this, the invisible must become visible. Where the most powerful telescopes discover only a small star, I must find a complete solar system with its planets and satellites."

It was truly wonderful to hear how calmly Roy spoke of overcoming the greatest difficulties that ever confronted human endeavour. "The invisible must become visible. . . ." And forthwith Roy set to work to accomplish it.

"You know," he continued, "that I have worked nine years at my invention. It took me nearly seven years to complete the dynamo and the air-boat—less than two years to construct my telescope. Yet these last two years contained by far the hardest work of my life. For eighteen months I laboured night and day—not calmly as I had hitherto worked, and strengthened by the certainty of success, but feverishly, with a tension of every nerve, and, at times, an awful fear of failure that would have meant madness if it had lasted. For eighteen months I worked ceaselessly—only to

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discover at last that the secret I sought was lying close at hand !

"You know that a large telescope will magnify celestial objects four thousand times, and bring the Moon within sixty miles of Earth. With the most powerful instruments a magnifying power of six thousand and even six thousand five hundred times is obtainable. Now, unless I would leave my work unfinished—see my discovery forever incomplete and fruitless—I must construct a telescope that would bring the farthest stars as near, or almost as near, as the apparent distance of the Moon in our largest equatorials.

"It seemed impossible. I knew it would be an achievement totally different from the discovery of the electro-magnetic current and its hitherto unsuspected motive power and velocity—a far more difficult work than the construction of an air-boat or a new kind of dynamo. In the making of these, Nature's forces were ready at hand ; they only needed to be brought out. It was the tremendous, inconceivable force of electricity that did the work : I merely built the machines. But this was different—or so it seemed to me. No matter what sudden progress I might make in the science of optics, what superior magnifying power I might obtain compared with that of the largest telescopes, it would still be insufficient for my purpose. Could I double the power of the largest lenses, and see the stars twelve thousand times their apparent size,

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it would still be but an imperceptible step towards the goal. Were my ambition to attain the planetary system of our nearest star, I must possess a telescope with a magnifying power, not of a few thousand, but of some hundred thousand million times! To bring the star Alpha Centauri within sixty miles of Earth, I must obtain a magnifying power of over three hundred and forty thousand million times! And if I wished—as indeed I do—to land on a planet over five hundred thousand times farther away, I must obtain the colossal magnifying power of one hundred and ninety thousand billion times!"

"And have you obtained it?" I asked breathlessly.

"If I had not," Roy answered quietly, "I would not have said my work was done."

"But Roy," I cried in my amazement, "are you a wizard—a sorcerer? Is failure impossible to you? Must you always succeed, even in the most daring, the most wonderful, the most unbelievable attempts? Is nothing beyond your reach? Are you human after all, Roy, or some omnipotent Genie of Eastern fable, some strange Spirit in earthly shape?"

"You would not ask the question," Roy replied with an amused smile, "if you had seen me in some of my moments of despondency, last year, when I worked at the great telescope! I was on the verge of brain fever once, and both Estrella and the little mother begged me with tears in their eyes

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to take a rest—but I could not. I knew that if I left my work for half a day only, I should break down. Sleep had become impossible, and I felt I must go on, and on, until the final victory—or defeat. But in spite of a momentary despair, in my heart I knew it would be victory.

"It was a mere chance—we call these things chance for want of a better name—that led me at last to the great discovery. One night I was experimenting with the miniature model of my dynamo and sending small electric currents across my study, when I noticed a curious luminosity on one of the telescope lenses that was lying on a table in the direction of the ray. I examined it attentively, and, to my intense surprise, saw that, under the influence of the electro-magnetic current, its magnifying powers were apparently increased a thousandfold. My joy at this discovery I will leave you to imagine! I trembled so with excitement that I could hardly handle the machine, but after a time I managed to dispose in front of the dynamo two plano-convex lenses, separated by two-thirds of the focal length of either. I then turned on the most powerful current which the machine can generate, and—success at last! The lenses were transformed into a telescope of incomparable magnitude!

"You are my friend," continued Roy with a smile, "my oldest and best friend, so I may as well confess to you that in the first gladness of

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this discovery—the sudden relief in a brain tension of months—I fainted like a wee woman beside my machine, where Estrella found me the next morning and mourned me as dead! So you see," he added gaily, "that I am very human after all, in spite of your evil insinuations about wizards and sorcerers!"

"No wonder you fainted," I remarked severely. "No other man would have borne this strain, and lived."

"My dear Clive, you are mistaken. Each man has his work to do in this world—and his share of strength to do it with. To discover the secret of inter-stellar communication was my work—and with God's help I have done it. It has not been as difficult as you imagine. Nature took by far the greater share in the work. I did the rest."

I hardly knew at that moment what most to admire in the man—the splendour of his creative genius, or his perfect simplicity. We were silent for a while, absorbed in thought. At last Roy spoke:

"You have seen the star—*my* star, as I like to call it—with an ordinary telescope. You must now see it with the electric current turned on to the lenses. But first I must change the transparent glass for a coloured one. . . . Now look!"

He touched a spring in the dynamo that communicated with the telescope, and as I looked through the instrument, lo! before my eyes the

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star became a sun—the faint dot of light was transformed into a flaming world of incomparable brilliancy and magnificence.

I gave a cry of wonder and delight.

"Is it not beautiful?" said Roy. "And to think that every one of the hundred millions of stars known to us are suns like this, centres of planetary systems. . . . What human words can speak these wonders?"

In rapt silence I gazed at that distant sun which shed its light on me through the inconceivable chasms of space—a light so intense as to be almost blinding, in spite of the soft blue tint of the coloured glass. An incandescent atmosphere enveloped it as with a veil of fire, and from time to time huge pillars of flame rose from its surface, remained for a moment suspended in mid-air like a luminous cloud, then fell in a multitude of radiant drops—showers of flame on a world of fire.

When at last I took my eyes away from the dazzling star, I saw Roy standing beside me, watching me with an amused smile.

"If you are so rapt in admiration at the sight of one little star, what will you say—and do—when you see the marvels of double, treble, multiple stars, stars glittering with all the colours of the rainbow, nebulæ composed of millions of clustered suns?"

"When shall I see them?" I asked eagerly.

"When you will: to-morrow, if you wish it,

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or to-night. As long as the telescope is here—and the heavens above us—you can discover a new marvel every day, for the number of stars spells infinity."

"But, Roy," I exclaimed suddenly, as a new thought struck me, "how shall you return?"

I awaited his reply in breathless suspense, dreading he might say, in this quiet tone of his: "I shall not return." To my intense relief he answered with a smile:

"It will not be quite so easy to return to Earth as to depart from it; still, it can be done, else my discovery would indeed be incomplete. I have just added the last touches to another model of my small dynamo, built in such a way that it can easily be taken to pieces; this, together with a specially constructed electric accumulator, will be packed into a corner of the air-ship, and so accompany us in space."

"You have an answer to everything," I said, smiling in spite of myself. "But can you show me the planet you will land on?" I asked, with pardonable curiosity.

"It is not in very good condition of visibility at present," answered Roy; "but you can see it, nevertheless. It is in its third phase."

Once more I looked eagerly through the telescope—after it had been readjusted—and once more I could not repress a cry of admiration at the sight which met my gaze. In the field of vision sailed

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a large planet, silver-white, and emitting the soft radiance of the Moon on a clear summer's eve. Indeed, so closely did its shape resemble that of our satellite in its third quarter, so familiar looked its serene white face against the sombre background of the heavens, that for a moment I thought myself the victim of an illusion. Was I in very truth gazing at a planet so remote that a ray of light would take hundreds of years to bridge over the gulf between us, or was it the Moon, Earth's faithful little satellite, slowly rising in the sky?

"I feel as if I were looking at the Moon through a small telescope," I said to Roy. "It is so strangely like it——"

"Yes, but with a nearer view the resemblance will cease. The apparent distance is now a little less than one hundred miles. I will bring it down to five miles."

He released another spring in the dynamo, and a moment later I was gazing upon the continents of the far-away planet, as a man standing on some lofty peak looks down on the forests and plains, the roads and the rivers, lying at his feet.

It was a wonderful scene—strangely familiar—strangely unfamiliar. Streams of running water meandered to the sea in the same capricious curves I had so often admired from the top of a high hill in Devonshire or Surrey—but the fields through which they flowed were the colour of red-gold

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touched by the setting sun. Here and there tall vegetals grew to the very edge of the water, reflecting their sombre shapes in the transparent stream—but the forms thus mirrored were forms never yet seen by human eyes. Mountains rose in the distance, high-peaked and glittering with eternal snow; clouds passed over their heads and trailed their long shadows in the valleys. . . . Sunshine and shade, mountains, plains, rivers, and trees,—an earthly landscape that yet was not of Earth. . . . Trees that were golden, mountains that suggested some dimly-remembered scene in Fairyland!

I spoke my thoughts aloud.

"Yes," said Roy, "it is always one's first impression when face to face with other worlds. To see an earth that yet is not Earth! It seems like a vision that can have no existence in reality, a dream-picture that must vanish as swiftly as it appeared. It takes us time to realise that every star in heaven is the centre, the sun, of a system of planets like our own—worlds where there is night and day, cold and heat, mountains, streams, growing trees—flowers that open in the sunshine—animals that dream—men that think, hope, strive, and look upwards to the sky."

"But, Roy," I said suddenly, "as you see this planet, so you can see every planet in space?"

"I can."

"And you can see their humanities?"

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"I have seen them."

I took a deep breath. Every word spoken by Roy opened new doors into the Infinite.

"Yes, I have seen them, Clive, and soon all the nations of the Earth shall see them! When my telescope is given to the world—— Ah, Clive, what a revelation! Think," Roy continued, with one of his quick flashes of enthusiasm, "think how man thrilled when first he learned that creatures like himself lived and breathed at the Antipodes! Think of Columbo's ecstasy when the shores of the New World rose out of the sea to greet him! . . . But this, Clive, this will open to man, not merely all the pathways of his little Earth, but all the immensities of creation. . . . It will enable him to hail his brother-man across the void—soul answering soul through the infinite spaces. . . ."

As Roy ceased speaking, a long silence fell upon us. I was still sitting in front of the telescope, my head resting on my hands, and the hot blood throbbing in my temples. I felt bewildered, overwhelmed, crushed almost, by all the wonders I had heard and seen—by the weight of the wonders to come.

"Clive," said Roy at last, "you are tired: I have tired you! No, do not deny it, but go to bed at once, and try hard not to dream of stars, planets, and distant humanities."

I rose reluctantly.

"There are still so many questions I wanted to

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ask—so many points that are not quite clear. . . . For instance, I do not understand——"

"How the air-boat will be launched into space?" interrupted Roy quickly. "Or how I shall land on the distant planet? Or in what way —— But of course you do not understand, for I have really explained nothing: I merely told you what I shall do—not how I shall do it. To-morrow I will show you the mechanism of the machines—I shall not even spare you the plans, diagrams, and equations;—but to-night you must rest—and sleep if you can!"

"Well, one more question, and I shall follow your advice. Had you any special reason for choosing this planet in preference to millions and tens of millions of others?"

Roy suddenly looked grave.

"Yes, I had a reason: not one other planet in infinite creation would have meant to me what means this one—this only one! . . . From this planet, Clive, I shall see——" There was a momentary hesitation in his voice. "I hope to see a sight more wonderful, more beautiful in itself than all the pageantry of the Universe. . . . But I must not speak of this now. . . . Besides, it cannot be told in one moment. . . . To-morrow, or some other day. . . . And now, shall we say good-night?"

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CHAPTER IX

ESTRELLA'S DECISION

WHEN, next morning, I met Estrella in the garden, she greeted me with outstretched hands and a happy smile.

"Ah, Clive, how glad I am that you know everything at last! It was hateful keeping it a secret from you, and mother,—though mother guessed it long ago—and so did you, perhaps? Come, confess! Was the mystery of mysteries revealed to you in a vision, or did you roam about the observatory and peep through the keyhole?"

"Neither," I replied laughing, "but I thought—— Well, I hardly know what I thought! That something wonderful was in course of preparation, of course I knew; but that this something was to be a journey into space, to the farthest stars. . . . Why, even now, I fancy at times that I have dreamt the most amazing of dreams, and I shall presently awake, write a book about it, and become famous!"

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"You would not rob poor Roy of his hard-earned fame?" queried Estrella gaily. "Think what a revelation it will be to the world when his discovery is made known!"

"And that will be——?"

Estrella shook her head with a little movement of annoyance.

"Ah, not yet—not yet! I have often begged him to make it known as soon as it is completed, but he is obdurate. His answer is always the same: 'When I return from a successful journey to the stars, then the world shall know. . . .' And Lord Vynne goes a step further and tells him: 'Make your discovery known before you start, and the world will call you a dangerous lunatic—make it known when you return, and it will hail you as the greatest genius ever born of woman!'"

"But," I ventured to say, "suppose—that Roy —never returns?"

"O Clive, don't say that!" pleaded Estrella. "I know he will return! I believe," she added with a smile, "that he has given me something of his wonderful faith, for I used to be like poor mother, and dream of untold dangers—picture awful catastrophes in mid-space—yet now I am fearless: I know he will return, I know he will succeed.

"But," she added in a lower voice, after a moment's silence, "even if he remained—in space —in some distant planet—even then his invention

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would not be lost to the world. He has foreseen everything. Nearly all his plans are ready for immediate publication—those that are not, will be completed before he starts ; then, there are the toy models of his machines, all perfect in themselves. He made me promise that if he did not return within four years, I should make his invention known far and wide. 'For where I may fail,' he said, 'another may succeed, and if I have only shown the way, I shall feel my work was not done in vain.' "

We stood silent and dreaming for some moments, walking hand in hand, like two children, down the narrow garden path. It was one of those perfect summer mornings when Nature and Man sing in unison the great song of life. Roses swung their incense cups in the warm breeze, laburnums shed golden flakes at our feet, and tall lilies rose high on their stems to see the lovers pass. . . . How fair seemed the world, with the woman I loved by my side ! As in a dream I remembered the wonders I had seen in Roy's observatory, and felt that no star or planet in space, no unknown beauties of distant systems, could yield me the gladness of this June morning on earth, as I walked in the sunshine with Estrella's hand clasped in mine.

Instead of the passionate admiration that had thrilled me the night before, on learning Roy's discovery, I felt a vague regret, almost akin to pity, when I thought of my friend passing, with

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eyes and heart closed, through the springtime of his life, searching the heavens and dreaming of other worlds—when there was love in this!

"I was so bewildered last night," I said at length, "so dazed by all the marvels I had seen, that I never thought of asking Roy when he intends to start on his aerial journey. I suppose it will be some time next year?"

Estrella stopped short in her walk, and her fingers tightened on mine.

"Some—time—next year?" she repeated, looking at me with troubled eyes. "Why, how is it Roy did not tell you——" She hesitated for a moment. "O Clive! He and Lord Vynne will start in ten days' time!"

It was my turn to look at her in amazement.

"You cannot mean this, Estrella? You must be mistaken! And Lord Vynne——? I never knew he was to accompany Roy. And in ten days? Why, surely it is impossible!"

In spite of my serenely philosophical mood of a moment ago, I felt myself trembling with excitement.

"Yes, dear, it is quite true. And of course Lord Vynne shall go: someone must go. . . . Think of Roy starting alone on such a journey—alone in space! And ten days is the last limit, you know. . . . If he does not start then, he will be too late."

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"Too late?" I repeated, feeling more and more puzzled. "Why too late?"

Estrella gave me a long, deep look.

"You do not know?" she whispered at last.

"I do not know what you mean, darling. Is there another mystery?"

And as I spoke I remembered Roy's words of the night before: "No other planet in infinite creation would have meant to me what means this one—this only one. . . . But I must not speak of this now. . . . Besides, it cannot be told in one moment. . . ."

Another wonder in the midst of wonders? Another mystery in the web of mysteries?

"What do you mean, Estrella?" I asked, still clasping her hand in mine and looking into her eyes.

Her lips quivered as she met my glance.

"I must not tell you, dearest," she said gently, "not if Roy has not told you—yet. It is so very wonderful," she murmured dreamily, after a minute's silence. "I thought you knew—everything. But Roy will tell you—soon—and then there shall be no more secrets between us! I hate secrets,—don't you?" she added in a brighter tone, as she turned to me with a smile.

We were alone in the garden—or so I thought—and I drew her close to me to kiss the smile on her lips, when suddenly we heard a hasty step on the

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gravel path behind us. We turned. It was Roy, and his face was white and drawn.

"Roy!" cried Estrella, running towards her brother.

It was some moments before he spoke, and then his voice had a harsh, unusual ring. He looked at his sister and then at me.

"Lord Vynne has just had a fall from horseback, and has broken his thigh," he said at last. "He cannot be moved for at least two months."

"Royal!"

There was a ring of anguish in Estrella's voice which I would not have understood a moment ago; but now, with her last words still ringing in my ears: "Think of Roy alone—alone in space!" its meaning was only too clear. The accident to Lord Vynne meant either that Roy would not go, or that he must go alone.

We were looking at one another in a silence filled with anxious thoughts, when a slight noise and the rustle of a silk dress betrayed Mrs Staunton's presence among us. She had probably seen her son as he passed through the house, and, struck by his pallor, had followed him, unperceived, down the garden path. She stood a little way behind Estrella—a frail, dark-clad figure in the dazzling sunshine,—and watched Roy as only a mother can watch the son whom danger threatens.

When Roy turned towards her she came forward

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with outstretched arms. She too had heard—and understood.

"Roy," she pleaded, "you will not go alone?"

Roy was silent. She came a step nearer.

"Roy, you will not do this? . . . O my son, my little son, my Royal, not this—no, not this! Have pity on your mother, Roy! . . . I have been patient. . . . I have said nothing, all these years. . . . I tried to be brave, for your sake! But not this, Roy! Not this! . . . Oh, if only you knew a mother's heart! . . . No, this is beyond my strength. . . . Roy, have pity! Not alone—alone in the night, in the silence, in the eternal void. . . . O God, have pity on me!"

Never shall I forget the look in Roy's eyes as he answered—his voice scarcely raised above a whisper:—"Mother, you break my heart! . . . It is my life's work: I must go."

"But not alone: I will go with you, Roy!"

Had *my* brain dictated, *my* lips uttered these words? In the sudden hush which followed them, I asked myself the question. Certainly one second before I spoke I did not know that I should speak. Then Mrs Staunton's voice rose in the silence, like a great cry of deliverance: "God bless you, Clive!"

Involuntarily I turned towards Estrella, and as I met her eyes I realised the full meaning of my words.

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"My life now belongs to another," I said slowly, "but if Estrella allows it, I will go."

"I shall not accept this sacrifice," said Roy peremptorily. "It was different with Vynne. He was eager, anxious even, to go; he is alone in the world, with no ties but those of friendship. Whereas Clive——"

"Listen to me, Roy," I interrupted eagerly. "I swear to you that, were it not for Estrella's sake, it would be no sacrifice! I would willingly accompany you—in space—or wherever you choose to go! From my childhood you have been my friend, and I would follow you without fear, in this world or beyond. . . . Estrella has faith in your invention. She believes you will return. . . . Let her but consent to it, and I will go."

As I said the last word I sought her eyes with I know not what fear, yet what wild longing, to hear her say: No! But her lips remained mute, and her eyes avoided mine. A heavy silence fell over us.

Then once more Mrs Staunton's voice rose in supplication, but "For Roy's sake, Estrella!" was all she said.

Estrella hid her face in her hands.

"Oh! Leave me time," she cried, "time to think—to decide—to pray!"

. . . . . .

That evening, in the little summer-house where we had plighted our troth, Estrella gave me her

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answer. It was the one I had foreseen. In the world-old conflict between love and duty, Estrella was not the girl to choose love, and, in happy indifference, leave duty to take care of itself.

"For Roy's sake—for mother's sake—and mine, dear heart—Go!"

And thus was decided my journey into space.

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CHAPTER X

THE LAST MYSTERY

"CLIVE, you are to be my companion in the strangest, most wonderful journey ever made by man. Do you realise this?"

"Fully."

"And are you aware that in a journey such as this we shall risk our lives a hundred times?"

"A hundred only? Why, that's nothing: we risk it oftener on Earth, if we happen to be fond of open-air sports—war included."

"True," smiled Roy, "and at least if we do die in space there will be originality in the manner of our death."

"Originality? Yes! But, alas, none near at hand to appreciate it; for, to be quite candid with you, Roy, I do not think we shall ever land on these distant shores. I have an idea that we shall be overtaken on the way by a fate as weird and wonderful as may befall adventurous celestial explorers! But don't think I dread it, Roy!

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Indeed, were it not—that—I must bid Estrella a long farewell, my only regret would be this absence of witnesses to our fate. Think," I continued, with a gaiety less real than assumed, "think what a book could be made of our death scene, broken up, as we probably shall be, into burning atoms, by an encounter with some unforeseen comet! Now, the feeling that someone—or something—saw our last struggle—that, in some distant planet, eyes of men or monsters were opened on us—would be less harrowing than the thought of death in the utter solitudes of space."

"Does the prospect appal you?" asked Roy, quietly.

"Well, no—only—it is not a particularly cheerful one, is it?"

Roy smiled his bright, ever confident smile.

"'*Qui ne risque rien n'a rien*,' says the wise French proverb. Has any great deed ever been accomplished without risk of life? But then, what do we mean by risk of life? Do we not, in the strictest sense, risk our life from the hour of birth to the moment we draw our last breath? . . . In whatever way we look at death—whether as the joyful entrance into eternal life, or as the hideous falling into nothingness—this at least we all know: that it is inevitable. Well, if we know we must die, why trouble about the manner of our death? Here or there, in our bed or on a distant battlefield, in this world or another, on the surface of a planet

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or in the endless deserts of space, what matters how we die—if only we have not lived in vain?"

I was silenced for some moments; then, as a sudden thought struck me: "Would it not be wise, Roy," I suggested, "to make a trial trip to the Moon or to one of the nearest planets, before setting sail for the stars?"

Roy shook his head.

"It might be wise," he answered, "and it certainly would be prudent; but it is quite impossible."

"Impossible?"

"Yes! My projectile will go to the farthest stars; it will go to the confines of the Universe—if these exist; but it will not, it cannot, cross so small an astronomical distance as that between the Earth and Moon."

"Why not?"

"Simply because it would have to stop before it had started," Roy replied, with an amused smile.

I looked my bewilderment.

"What is the distance between the Earth and Moon?" continued Roy. "About two hundred and fifty thousand miles. Now, the *least* velocity generated by my dynamo is one hundred million miles per second, so that the electric current would leap from the Earth to the Moon in the four-hundredth part of a second! The current will do this, but no machine, no projectile of man's invention could do likewise. Any earthly

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substance arriving on the Moon, or on one of the planets, with this prodigious velocity—and remember that velocity means power—would be instantaneously annihilated! Why, if our planet Earth, which travels around the sun merely at the rate of about seventeen miles a second, were to meet another planet on its way, the force of the impact—or rather the cessation of movement suddenly transformed into heat—would reduce both worlds to vapour, thus forming an immense gaseous nebula. Imagine, then, the fate of my air-boat if it were thrown on the Moon with a velocity of one hundred million miles a second!"

"How shall you obviate this difficulty in the case of long distances?"

"Merely by aiming the electric current, not at the planet itself, but at a proximate distance, so that the projectile, in the last stage of its journey, will be drawn towards the planet by no other force than that of acquired velocity—to which the attraction of the planet itself will, of course, be added, as we approach its sphere of influence. I need hardly tell you that this distance must be measured with the utmost precision; for if the moment we cease to be propelled by the electric current does not exactly coincide with the moment of our entering the planet's sphere of attraction, we may land—if we land at all—God knows where! On another planet of the system, perhaps, or on one of the satellites, or even—and more probably—

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on the sun-star itself. I have not quite solved this problem yet—but it is merely a question of angular measurement."

"And what a problem, ye gods! It takes one's breath away."

"Not at all. It is simple as the rule of three. I will make it quite clear to you in a moment."

"No, spare me, Roy, spare me!" I entreated tragically. "If you bring trigonometry into the debate, my enthusiasm for our stellar expedition will cool in direct proportion to the difficulty of the problem and—in inverse proportion—to the square of the distance—of— Do help me out, Roy!"

"Well," laughed Roy good-humouredly, "I will spare you the details of angular measurement; but if you have decided to come with me, Clive, I cannot let you go blindfolded into space! For instance, you know very little as yet of the planet which will be our home for a year — perhaps more."

I felt an inward chill at the thought of this long exile from Earth—but I wisely kept the feeling to myself.

Roy continued: "You were struck at first sight with the resemblance of this planet to the Moon, but when you saw it at a nearer distance you thought it strangely like—and yet unlike—the Earth."

"Yes, it was a curious sensation. Sometimes it looked like our own world, with its clouds, its

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rivers, its mountains; then again it looked like some wonderland, such as one sees in dreams."

"When you see other planets of space—for instance, the planets belonging to the systems of Antares, Aldebaran, Alpha Hercules, those wonderful worlds of the red stars with their inconceivably strange life-manifestations—you will wonder more than ever at the curious resemblance this far-away globe bears to our little Earth. Indeed, I believe we shall find this planet, situate at nearly twelve quatrillions of miles from us—belonging to another system, gravitating around another sun—we shall find it resembling more closely our own world than some of the farthest planets of our system—Saturn, Uranus, or Neptune."

"How so?" I asked with great curiosity.

"You are aware that the spectroscope reveals to us the elements composing the most distant stars whose light reaches the Earth? With the aid of this wonderful instrument—truly one of the most magnificent inventions of man!—we have discovered that, while the red and orange coloured stars are without hydrogen, the white stars, like Sirius, and the yellow stars, like our own sun, contain all the gases necessary to human life: hydrogen, sodium, magnesium, and so forth. These gases reveal the presence of oceans in the planets of the system, since a planet, being born of its sun, does of necessity possess all the sun's elements in more

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or less diversified combinations. Thus we know that a certain yellow or white star, invisible to the naked eye and hidden so far away in the deserts of space that its light will take thousands of years to reach us, is the centre of a system that bears a close—perhaps a wonderfully close—resemblance to our own. We know, as certainly as we can know anything, that in the planets surrounding it are seas and lakes, rivers and torrents, clouds, and rain, and snow. We know that on the surface of these distant worlds—how distant no effort of imagination can appreciate—the sun-star rises and sets in a glory of purple and golden clouds, the mists of distance soften the outlines of hills and cliffs, snow crowns the highest peaks, and spring-time sends forth torrents into the valleys;—all inanimate nature so closely resembles our own that we may truly hail these worlds as our sister planets in infinite space.

"And the red or orange stars?" I queried eagerly.

"A red or orange star is a star without hydrogen—and a star without hydrogen means a solar system without water. And can we imagine anything more opposed to all our conceptions of nature? Every child will understand that if life exists in these worlds, it must be a life absolutely inconceivable to the human mind. A world without water means a world with neither vegetal nor animal life as we know it on Earth, with no atmosphere, nor any of the meteorological phenomena familiar to

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us on Earth. Now, this planet whither we are bound belongs to the system of a white sun, as dazzlingly white as the royal Sirius himself, and spectral analysis—confirmed by the revelations of my telescope—shows that it possesses all the elements necessary to life, vegetal and animal. Unlike our world, it is the sixth, instead of the third planet of its system. Its distance from the sun-star is over one hundred and seventy million of miles—while ninety-one million of miles only separate the earth from its sun; yet, as this far-away sun is almost twice the volume of our own, the planet in all probability receives the same quantity of light and heat that we receive on Earth. The planet itself is far larger than ours, for its diameter exceeds fourteen thousand miles; but its component parts seem to be extremely light, so that, in spite of its volume, its density cannot be very different from that of the Earth. Also, it is richer in satellites than we are, for it possesses no less than six moons of different colours; and as the one nearest to the planet—at a distance of only one hundred and twenty thousand miles—is nearly double the size of our moon, this satellite alone would give to the planet nights as brilliant as our noonday."

"And is the succession of days and nights the same as on Earth?"

"Yes, the length of its days closely resembles that of terrestrial days, for the planet revolves around its axis in exactly twenty-six hours and

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forty minutes; and as the axis is almost perpendicular to the orbit, its days are of the same length throughout the year ; and the seasons are evenly distributed between the three zones—hot, temperate, and cold. If unknown meteorological influences are not at play, its climate, in the temperate zone, must be an eternal springtime—a spring that is probably equivalent in warmth to an Italian summer. But not merely in its *conditions* of life, but in its *manifestations* of life—in its fauna and its flora—does it bear a close resemblance to Earth."

"And its inhabitants——?"

"You mean its humanity? It does not yet exist. The planet is still in its early stages of development—a stage probably corresponding to the middle of our tertiary period. Man has not yet appeared. . . . Does that disappoint you?"

"Well, I hardly know whether it does or not. Judging by our own, those alien humanities may not always be goodly to look upon, nor pleasant to dwell with! At least, we shall have the planet all to ourselves."

"Yes, unless a humanity has been evolved in the last nineteen hundred years. If so, it will be a humanity closely allied to ours, since, by every law of analogy, like planets will produce like inhabitants. But you must not forget that we see this world, and the system to which it belongs, not as it is to-day, but as it was over nineteen hundred

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years ago. It is a short time for man to emerge from the brute—still, who can tell?"

"What do you mean, Roy?" I asked in complete bewilderment.

"Why, simply that light takes over nineteen hundred years to traverse the distance between this universe and ours. We see the planet in the past, not in the present. Indeed, there is this possibility —although a very remote one—that the planet whither we are bound no longer exists."

"No—longer—exists?" I repeated aghast. "The planet I saw last night——?"

"Yes," smiled Roy, "the planet you saw last night may have ceased to exist for nearly two thousand years, since this is the time a ray of light will take to pass from this world to ours."

For some seconds I gazed at Roy helplessly.

"I do not understand you," at last came my reluctant confession.

"You will understand in a moment," Roy asserted convincingly. "When you throw a stone in the middle of a pond and watch the slow formation of ripples, you notice that a few seconds elapse before the outer ripples attain the banks of the pond; thus you perceive that the motion communicated to the water by the stone is *a gradual one.* When you strike a bell, the vibrations of the metal communicate themselves to the air in identically the same way. The sound spreads equally in all directions, and this dispersion of movement is again

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a gradual one. Stand at some distance from the bell, and you will hear the sound three, four, five or more seconds after the bell has been struck. Now, the vibrations of ether, which produce light, are as gradual as the vibrations of air, which produce sound; only, light travels with the enormous speed of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles in one second, while in the same time sound does not even cross the distance of one mile.

"Yet, great as is the velocity of light, its gradual propagation is noticeable, even in so small an astronomical distance as that between the sun and Earth—ninety-one millions of miles—which it takes a ray of light eight minutes to traverse. The consequence is, that we see the sun, not as it is at the moment we are looking at it, but as it was eight minutes ago. Multiply the distance, and you multiply the delay of light rays. Take the distance between us and the nearest star—twenty billions, two hundred millions of miles: the luminous rays emitted by this star will take three years and six months to reach us, constantly travelling at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second. This, by the way, brings us nearer to a comprehension of astronomical distances than any measurement by trillions, quatrillions, or quintillions of miles."

"And so the planet I saw last night——?"

"The planet you saw last night is, as you know,

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at a distance of about eleven quatrillions, five hundred trillions of miles—I spare you the number in its entirety; consequently, light will need over nineteen hundred years to span the gulf between us, and we see the planet, not as it is to-day, but as it was over nineteen hundred years ago. Not only the planet I have chosen as my landing-stage, but the sun-star itself and all its planetary system, may have ceased to exist for hundreds of years, while still we examine and study them through our telescopes. Of course, this is but the remotest possibility. It is more than improbable that this splendid solar system, with all its planets and satellites, should have been annihilated by some unimaginable cataclysm. It is a little less improbable that one planet in its system may have been destroyed, as planets sometimes are, by a meeting with a comet. But even this is well-nigh impossible, and there is every reason to suppose that we shall find this far-away universe the same to-morrow as it was nineteen hundred years ago—for what is nineteen times nineteen hundred years in the lifetime of a star?

"Don't you remember," Roy asked suddenly, after some moments' silence, "those lines we learnt at school:

> 'Were a star quenched on high,
> For ages would its light
> Still travelling downwards from the sky
> Shine on our mortal sight . . .?'"

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I remembered the poem, which had once been a favourite of mine, and immediately continued the quotation :

> "So, when a great man dies,
> For years beyond our ken
> The light he leaves behind him lies
> Upon the paths of men."

"Why," Roy cried triumphantly, "if you remember it so well you can no longer plead ignorance of the subject!"

"Oh, I understand," I exclaimed somewhat peevishly, "I understand,—though my brain reels! We are going to a planet which may no longer exist. . . . We see this planet, and its sun, and all its sister planets, not as they are at the present moment, but as they were hundreds of years ago. . . . And, travelling at this terrific pace, we shall outdistance light—outdistance Time itself! And from this planet——Why, then," I cried suddenly, as a new thought struck me, "from this planet, if ever we attain it, we shall see the Earth as it was nineteen hundred years ago?"

"We shall," said Roy.

"And with your wonderful telescope we shall be able to study the humanities of the past? We shall see mankind as it was in the time of the Romans—of the Greeks—in the time of Augustus and Julius Cæsar—in the times——"

I suddenly paused and looked at Roy. There was a light in his eyes as of the joy of victory.

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During a few seconds we looked at each other in a pregnant silence. The blood throbbed in my temples, and I could hear the beating of my heart.

"Nineteen hundred years ago!" I said slowly, each word I uttered seemingly written in letters of fire on my brain. "Nineteen hundred years ago Christ was crucified on Calvary!"

"Yes," said Roy; and the light deepened in his eyes.

I understood.

It was indeed the last and greatest mystery.

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CHAPTER XI

FREEDMEN OF SPACE

THE day of days had arrived—the fateful day wherein, for the first time in the world's history, two sons of Earth were to bid farewell to their native planet and set sail for the infinite spaces.

My feelings on that day—and for many days preceding it—were so strangely mixed, so intricately woven of anticipation and regret, pleasure and pain, eagerness and despondency, that I am convinced I could not have behaved like a rational being ; but as the moment of departure approached, every conflicting emotion merged into the one aching, poignant sense of separation from my Belovëd. As for Roy, he was outwardly calm, and master of himself.

We were to start after sunset, and every detail of preparation was completed in the early morning.

The form of our air-boat was, as I have already stated, a conico-cylindrical one—the only possible

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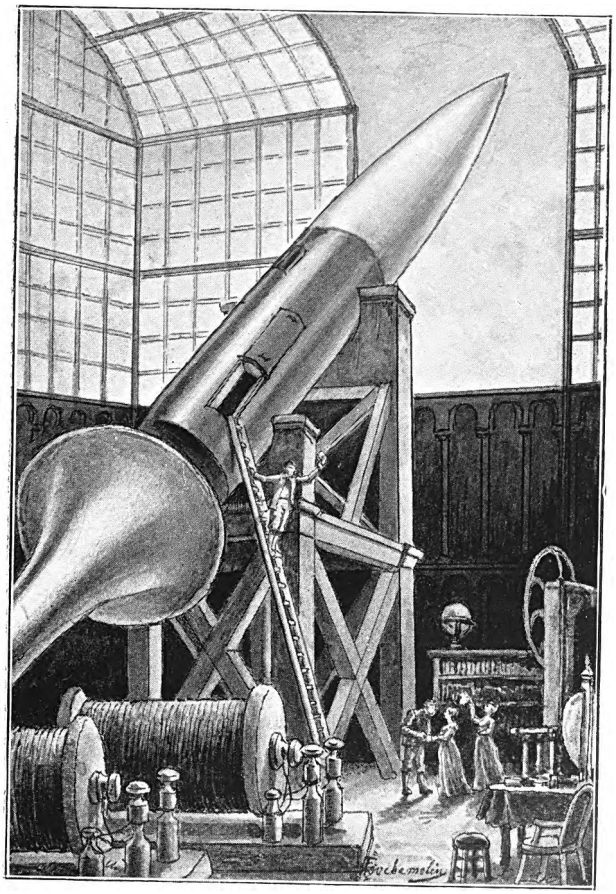

"The day of days had arrived"

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shape for ethereal navigation. The sharply-pointed cone of solid aluminium, which terminated it at one end, was destined to break the shock of our landing by embedding itself, as it must of necessity do, in the soft soil of the planet; moreover, a powerful pneumatic buffer had been placed between the cone and the main body of the projectile. With the exception of this cone—about fifteen feet in length, and twelve feet wide at its base—the projectile was entirely hollow, and its aluminium walls barely exceeded twelve inches in thickness. From its base to the extremity of the cone, the air-boat measured close on forty feet.

To avoid conflagration while traversing the atmosphere of the distant planet, the outer walls of the projectile were completely covered with asbestos slate, save at the base of the cylinder, where the full pressure of the electric current was to be exerted. On leaving the Earth, our velocity would be so prodigious that an inappreciable fraction of time only would be needed to traverse the layer of atmospheric air, so that our air-boat would literally lack time to generate heat by friction. But on arriving within the sphere of attraction of the unknown planet, we were to travel towards it with no other force than that of gravity. Accordingly, without the asbestos covering, our fate in entering its atmosphere would be that of every aerolite that falls upon the Earth: the

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air-boat would be reduced to a molten mass and its adventurous occupants—to ashes!

As for the base of the projectile, it was covered, instead of asbestos slates, with a close network of copper wires, destined to receive a continual, powerful charge of positive electricity. This was one of the most important details in Roy's invention, for without it the wonderful velocity generated by the dynamo would have been useless, as, meeting with no obstacle in the shape of the positively charged wire, the electro-magnetic current would traverse the projectile as easily as a ray of sunlight passes through a pane of glass: the motive power of the current would no longer have been felt, and would thus have become a latent instead of a potential energy.

The interior of the air-boat, lighted and heated by electricity, had become, under Lord Vynne's practical guidance, a marvel of ingenuity, comfort, and perfect sanitation. The self-acting apparatus for making air was an improvement upon the simple, old-fashioned principle of potassium chloride and caustic potassium—one giving forth oxygen, the other absorbing carbonic acid gas.

The long vaulted space formed by the cylindrical walls was separated in two: one part—that nearest to the base of the projectile—being given over to the numerous machines and parts of machines that were to accompany us on our journey; and all these were securely fixed to the walls, an in-

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dispensable precaution for a voyage wherein weight would be reduced to zero, and ourselves and our possessions would become lighter than air.

In the front part, our tables, stools, beds, the wooden chests containing instruments, tools, books, clothes, compressed food, and medicines, all the many little essentials of daily life—essential even in interstellar spaces !—were likewise firmly secured to the metal floor, thus giving our temporary home something of the appearance of a cabin on board ship. On one side of the cylinder heavy sliding doors, also made of aluminium, opened and closed by the mere pressure of an electric knob. Along the entire length of the cabin ran a stout, leather-covered hand-rail, which, as Roy explained, would become a necessity to us when our descent upon the unknown planet would cause the projectile to pass from the horizontal to the vertical position.

Close to what Roy called the North and South Poles of our air-boat—the South being at the base of the cylinder, the North at the point of the cone —were two small windows of ground glass, ten inches thick and greatly dimmed by a thick covering of mica plates. However, as Roy said, they would allow us "to see the night"—and for many months there would be nothing else for us to see !

I shivered a little at the dark vision conjured by these words, but I had vowed to myself to show neither reluctance nor fear as I followed Roy out of this world into the infinite Beyond—and I tried,

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not very successfully, to cheer myself with the thought of the sunshine, the warm breezes and brilliant vegetation of the planet whither we were bound.

How we spent that last day I hardly know, nor do I care to remember. We all strove to be cheerful and to speak hopefully of our return, but the attempt was not a success.

The moment of our departure was drawing near, when Roy suddenly exclaimed: "Why, is it possible? We have not named the boat!"

We had not, and the omission was a singular one. Immediately a dozen names were proposed, all equally commonplace: The Comet —The Explorer—The Aerolite—The Pioneer. . . . But as I met Estrella's eyes I received a minor inspiration.

"Call it the *Estrella*," I said, "and so it will be a little star journeying among its sister stars."*

And "Estrella" we baptized the boat. At my request, the young godmother wrote her name on the cabin wall, underneath one of the electric lamps, where we could see it night and day, like a symbol of hope. Beneath it we wrote the bold motto suggested by Lord Vynne: "*Nil mortalibus arduum est.*"

Evening came, and the sun set in a cloudless sky. The fateful moment had arrived. For the last few hours we had all—Mrs Staunton, Estrella,

* "Estrella" is the Spanish name for star.

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Roy and I—remained grouped around the boat, as if some strange magnetism had held us there against our will. Roy gave his last directions to his sister, to whom fell the task of setting the dynamo in motion and launching us into space. The brave girl did not flinch when the moment came.

By means of a cleverly conceived arrangement, the mere turning of the indicator on a dial set in the dynamo regulated the distance which the electric current was to span. Roy placed it in its right position. A mistake of the twentieth part of an inch would have meant the failure of his work and the forfeit of his life and mine; yet his hand did not tremble.

"Are you ready?" he asked Estrella; and as he said this their eyes met. Both turned a shade paler; but beyond the question and her answer, neither spoke. Then Roy turned towards me: "It is time," he said briefly.

The moment of parting, bitter as death, had come. With uncertain steps Roy walked towards his mother, who sat with closed eyes and hands folded, as if in prayer.

"Mother!" he called softly. Only the one word, the cry as of a little child when night has fallen and the darkness is filled with strange fears and mysteries—"Mother!"

With a supreme effort the little lady rose and tottered towards her son with arms outstretched, like one stricken with blindness. He had called

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to her as if in fear, yet it was she who sought his protection, who took refuge in his arms and hid her face against his breast.

"Mother!"

A tremor shook her from head to foot, but not a sound passed her lips. Slowly, gently—a world of tenderness and pity in every one of his movements,—Roy unclasped her hands from his neck and lifted her face to his, so that she looked into his eyes.

"Adios!" he said, very low. *Adios*—the soft Spanish farewell and commendation to God. . . . And in a clear voice she answered: "Adios!"—then quietly fainted away.

Roy's face set hard. He glanced at his watch, and then at me. I understood him. For the last time I clasped Estrella in my arms, covering her tear-stained face with passionate kisses.

"Farewell, love—but not for ever! So please God, not for ever, dear heart!"

The next moment is confused in my memory. A sob—a cry—a last look—and I was standing by Roy's side in the interior of the boat. The door slid on its hinges.

"Clive!"

Ah, that last pitiful cry of my love! That last sight of the little mother lying with eyes closed as in the sleep of death! God! Why is it no man can labour and gain the highest end unless a woman's heart is crushed on the way?

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I have a faint remembrance of feeling Roy's hand clasping mine as he asked in a whisper: "Are you ready, Clive?" And on my nodding assent—for my lips were parched as with thirst and I could not utter a sound—he pressed the knob which made fast the door. Immediately we felt, but very faintly, the answering throb of the dynamo as Estrella set it in motion, and—— Had we started? Were we suspended in mid-air? Was the Earth lying at our feet?

An almost imperceptible vibration, like a ripple on the surface of a pond, had made itself felt, then—nothing: absolute silence; absolute immobility. I ran to the north window: nothing but the star-filled night. I leaped to Roy's side, I looked out of the south window: only the star-filled night!

"Roy! Roy!" I cried, finding my voice at last in the excess of my stupor. "Where are we? Where is the Earth?"

"Look!" said Roy, pointing to the south window.

In the distance sailed a small planet, almost hidden in the rays of a large and singularly brilliant star.

"The Sun and Earth!" said Roy.

I drew back with a smothered cry, gazing about me in incredulous amazement. For a moment I was overwhelmed by the awful reality.

"In space! In infinite space!" I repeated, as I stared into the star-strewn night.

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"Yes, in space," repeated Roy, who strove hard to be calm and collected; "we are in space—but is this so very wonderful? Have we not always been in space, in infinite space? Is not yonder little world journeying in space? The main difference is that on Earth we journeyed with fifteen hundred millions of our fellow-creatures, while now we are in space—alone."

Alone! The word sounded cold as death. Alone in the infinite spaces! Alone in the night and the silence of eternity!

Alone!

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CHAPTER XII

TO THE CONFINES OF THE UNIVERSE

SHALL not dwell long on our journey in space, for it was strangely—I might almost say cruelly—uneventful.

When the first wonder of our situation and our new conditions of life began to wear off—when I no longer thought myself a disembodied spirit because my body had ceased to be a burden, but moved about with me as lightly as if it had been made of wings of butterflies—when the wonderful dream became the everyday reality,—the monotony of our life began to weigh on me with a nameless oppression. With a mind untrained to astronomical distances, I had naïvely imagined that, once we were far away from Earth, we should be in the region of the stars, pass close to them, discover their planetary systems, and be illumined by their radiance as Earth is illumined by its sun. But although we crossed the void with the unimaginable speed of over three hundred million

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miles a second, yet we seemed to come no nearer to these suns of space.

My wonder increased as day followed day and still we journeyed in the endless desert. Day followed day, or rather an everlasting night slowly dragged its minutes one by one, and still the stars were remote, still they looked but mere dots of light on the dark face of heaven.

Young as I was, with all life before me and the woman I loved awaiting me in the far-away planet Earth—with, normally, no more desire for death than the average healthy human animal,—I yet longed, longed madly at times, for some wild disaster to befall us,—a meeting with comets—a conflagration of worlds—a falling of stars,—anything, any death, no matter how gruesome, anything to break the awful monotony, the perpetual silence, the eternal night.

More terrible even than the night was the silence —the unbroken silence of space. Many a time, on Earth, had I stood on some high peak, in Scotland or Wales, and listened to the great quietude of the mountains. Yet that silence seemed as the roar of the ocean compared with the unrelieved, absolute stillness of space. On the mountain top I sometimes heard the bleating of sheep in the valley, or the soft fall of a fir cone from its branch, or the cry of a hawk as it slowly circled over a precipice. But here—nothing: complete, eternal silence—the silence of the void.

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Sometimes I would stand by one of the windows, and listen—listen—listen—hoping to catch I know not what sound, what whisper of the infinite spaces. . . . Then, half maddened, and reeling like a drunken man, I would shout inanely: "We are in space, in space, in infinite space! At every second of time we are further by millions and millions of miles from the Earth—the little planet where once we lived—or was it a dream? Or is this a dream?"

But Royal was calm and self-possessed as ever, with the wonderful light burning in his eyes, and a confident, almost joyous smile on his lips.

And thus, in more or less patient waiting,—in reading, writing, and dreaming of the wonders that awaited us—the time of our captivity in space went slowly by.

Thank God, we were both of us lovers of books, and the cabin of the *Estrella* contained several large chests filled with the masterpieces of our favourite authors—all old friends, tried and not found wanting, old familiar friends we never tired of, but loved better as we knew them better. Roy had taken ponderous volumes of science and philosophy, while I brought with me a complete collection of the poets I loved—and they were many. In the place of honour, the works of Shakespeare the King—then Dante's *Divina Commedia*—Goethe's *Faust*—Schiller's and Hugo's grand historical dramas—the gem-lyrics of Heinrich

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Heine—Alfred de Musset's *Don Juan*—Baudelaire's *Sonnets*—the poems of Keats, that sweetest of all singers, and those of Eric Mackay, his true disciple among the moderns.

The great masters of prose were represented by the divine Montaigne's *Essais*, Bossuet's *Sermons*, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (variety is the soul of joy !), Macaulay's *Introduction*, Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*—and a batch of novels by Zola, Maupassant, Meredith, Hardy, Zangwill, and Henry James.

Thus companioned, there was little fear that our minds would starve ; and indeed intellectual nourishment seemed to be almost the only one we required, physically as well as mentally, for our bodies had ceased to exist save as palpable shapes that flitted to and fro at the command of our will.

Flying as we were through interstellar space, where there is no above and no below, no right side nor left, completely isolated in the endless void, our bodies had become dematerialised, in feeling if not in appearance, since one of the chief attributes of matter—weight—had vanished. Our air-boat was alone in space, like a little planet escaped from its system. There was no sun or planet near by to attract us to itself and so create in sentient bodies the feeling of weight. We were as light as air, lighter than a bird poised in mid-air, lighter than a winged insect in the blue. We

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moved about as one moves in a dream, or as spirits may move in the kingdom of shadows. We needed little or no sleep, for we could feel no fatigue; and in a true sense we never rested, for we never felt the need of rest; yet Roy decreed that we should live our days as nearly as possible in the same way as on Earth, lying down in the hours we called night, reading, writing, studying at regular intervals, in the hours we called day. Without this wise precaution I verily believe our minds would have become unhinged in the awful sameness of an existence not varied even by the familiar alternation of day and night, but dragging itself, apparently for ever, in the same darkness, the same silence, the same emptiness of space.

One day—we had been in space nearly two months, but time, as well as distance, seemed annihilated—I asked Roy to tell me something more about the last and greatest wonder of his discovery: a view of the Earth as it was nineteen hundred years ago, seen from a planet millions upon millions of miles away.

"Has this always been the central idea in your work?" I queried, "or did it evolve in a natural way from your discoveries? In other words, was the idea born of your invention, or your invention born of the idea?"

Roy was silent for a moment, as if in deep thought; at last he said meditatively: "This is a question I cannot answer. The two ideas, the

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two hopes, the two dreams, seem never to have been separated: to journey to the stars,—and from the stars to see the Earth as it was in the times of Christ. . . . At that memorable lecture on astronomy that we heard together in Jersey—does it not seem a lifetime ago?—there was a sentence of the professor that I know almost by heart, and I so remember it because I felt then as if every word were written in my brain. "Could we have wings," he said, "more wonderful than poet ever dreamt of, could we fly in one moment to the nearest star, we should see our Earth as it was three and a half years ago; did we take our flight still further into space, we would see our native world as it was twenty, fifty, a hundred years ago—as it was in the times of Elizabeth—of Alfred the Great—of Cæsar—as it was in the times of the early Greeks—of the first Egyptian civilisation—as it was before human footsteps had left their impress upon Earth. . . ." And immediately I added—or did someone tell it me in a whisper?—*As it was in the times of Christ!*

"From that night onward, the idea was with me—never to be forgotten. It seemed more like a vision than a thought. Forever I saw myself on a world so far away that it appeared to be at the very confines of the Universe, and from there I looked upon Earth—not the Earth of to-day, but the Earth of the past—the Earth as it was under the domination of the Cæsars and the Roman eagle—in the

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times when Jerusalem was but newly fallen, and the Temple still stood on Mount Moriah—the times of John the Baptist and the Christ Jesus."

"What is your faith?" I asked brusquely, in sudden remembrance of a conversation in the past.

After a moment's hesitation Roy answered slowly:

"My faith is in the True—the Beautiful—the Good—the ever holy Trinity that reveals itself to all men in all times."

"In nothing beyond?" I suggested.

Roy smiled.

"And is that not all-sufficient? Is not every one of these another name for God? Does it not embrace everything holy on Earth and in Heaven?"

I was silent for a moment, then remarked smilingly:

"There was a time when your faith was different—at least, when it was not quite as simple and elemental as this! Do you remember our ponderous talk on religion and philosophy, one evening, in the garden of your Jersey home? Why, you were half resolved on becoming a missionary to the London heathen, only you could not decide on the right message to deliver them! Do you remember?"

"Yes," said Roy thoughtfully, "I think I remember the conversation you mean,—and I

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certainly have not forgotten the mood which inspired it. . . . I suppose everyone that thinks must pass, once in his life, through the Gethsemane of doubt—when the burden of humanity, the burden of sorrow and sin, seems to rest on our shoulders, crushing all hope and all faith from our hearts. . . . When I learnt to know all the evil and shame and sorrow hidden in the world, it was my turn to face the inevitable question—in itself almost a revolt: Why? . . . Why is not the world as we see it in our childhood's dreams? Why are there broken hearts and broken lives, and sins too hideous to be told?

"The friend whose influence over my life was so great, answered the question in his own way. You know he was an Atheist. His answer could not satisfy me. I could not conceive the world without God: in my eyes, each blade of grass revealed Him! Yet the old faith had dropped from me as a cloak—I hardly know when—nor why. I became a Theist. A religion without Mediator, without Priest, without Church—a religion free and simple as love itself—how it appeals to the young soul seeking Truth!

"For a time I was an enthusiastic convert—and it helped to lighten the burden—but, little by little, I came to feel a void in the new faith. It was too divine: the human element was missing. It seemed to me that the basis of this religion was not a real, but an idealised, humanity—not man as he

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is, with all his weaknesses, his inconsistencies, his daily failures, but man as he should be—as he may be some day, on a higher plane of existence. The apostles of this faith seem to forget that man is essentially weak—that he needs a Friend, in human shape, to walk by his side in the rough roads of life—he needs a Christ, a Perfect Example —no matter by what name we call Him: Son of God—God—or Man!—One who has himself trodden the blood-stained paths, and having trodden them can say: *Follow me!* . . . With this realisation returned the old faith, but developed, widened almost beyond recognition. And with it returned the old idea—the old dream: to see, from some infinite distance in space, the Earth as it was in the times of Christ—to see Christ Himself living, teaching—dying. . . . I knew it was possible, but how to accomplish it I did not know. . . . At times the magnitude of the task overwhelmed me, and I wondered if I were not mad to dream of attaining so far, so inconceivably far, beyond the reach of man.

"It is curious that the problem of interplanetary communication should always have seemed to me a simple one to solve. When I discovered the marvellous velocity and motive power latent in electro-magnetism, I knew that not only interplanetary, but interstellar communication was made possible. Then my dream assumed a distinct

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shape: henceforth it was the central idea of my life. It reconciled me with myself: it gave to all my work a consecration of its own.

"You know how I longed—with all my heart and soul, God knows!—to be of some service to my fellow-creatures, the down-trodden and defeated in the battle of life. How the thought of them haunted me! The stars in all their glory could not make me forget them: the starving men, the fallen women, the little children who never play in the sunshine! It was like a great wail rising from Earth into the silent spaces. . . . But then—ah, Clive!—I thought of the rejoicing there would be in the world if from those silent spaces came an answering voice, a new-told message of peace and love. . . . If one returned from the Heavens to the Earth, saying: 'Behold, it is true! It is no dream, no dim tradition, no half-forgotten promise: it is the living truth! From the far distances of infinite space I have seen Him, who lived and died to teach us the meaning of love.' . . . Tell me, shall not the world thrill anew at the message? Shall not something of the joy of the first Christmas night return to us, when all nature was glad, and rejoiced at the coming of the Child?"

I gazed at Roy thoughtfully, silenced, as I had been so often before, by his faith and his enthusiasm. On Earth, on the far-away planet Earth, his wonderful hope could not have failed to move me deeply, but here, in space, in the silent

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spaces of infinity, every word he uttered was burdened with wonder and mystery. We were even now on the way to realise this hope, to possess ourselves of this dream, and every second that elapsed brought us nearer to the Secret as yet hidden in the womb of Time.

From those silent spaces, was ours the voice to bring the message back?

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Book II

Children of Space

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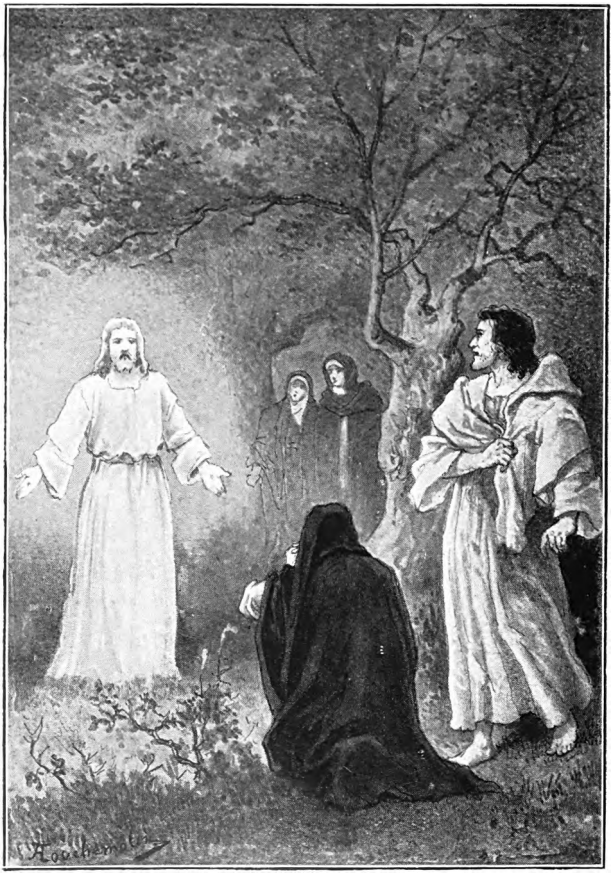

"Master!"

Around a Distant Star

Frontispiece to Book II

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CHAPTER I

ON THE SHORES OF A NEW WORLD

GOD be praised! Daylight at last! Not the familiar light of the sun, the golden brilliance wherein we had played as children, far away on the little planet Earth, but the strange silvery light of another sun in another universe.

At last, after the long, weary months of waiting, we were within sight of the goal! Already our speed was lessened, and we knew we were no longer in the power of the formidable electric current which had hitherto propelled us in space. We were rapidly flying towards the planet with the help of our acquired velocity, to which would succeed, when this had become exhausted, the attraction of the planet itself—if Roy's problem had been correctly solved! If it had not, we would have accomplished the most daring journey ever attempted by man, only to be wrecked within sight of the harbour, and see our projectile—man-made satellite of a newly discovered universe—

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become the small, inglorious moon of one of its planets—probably the very one we had meant to conquer and possess.

It was the crucial moment of our journey. Imprisoned in our projectile far more relentlessly than birds in a cage—for every law of Nature conspired to make our prison-house secure,—we were utterly powerless to help ourselves; and should the tenth part of a second be lacking between the moment our acquired velocity should cease and the attraction of the planet begin, we would not be able to raise a finger to guide our boat and ward off our fate.

With wildly beating hearts we pressed close to the north window and saw the planet, a small white sphere in the vast distance, shining in front of our path in the reflected radiance of its sun, while the sun itself, apparently motionless in the centre of the system, was gradually changing the dark emptiness of space into the splendour of an eternal noonday.

Slowly, very slowly—or so at least it seemed to us in our fevered impatience—the little sphere grew in size and brilliancy. Now it looked like a small moon—now it became a planet, large and resplendent as the Earth when it sails in the zenith of its satellite,—now—— Ah! . . . What was this? . . . A strange dizziness came over me—the metal floor of the *Estrella* seemed to give way beneath my feet, and I instinctively caught hold of

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the hand-rail to steady myself. Then the truth flashed upon us.

"God be praised," cried Roy, "we are falling on the planet!"

Falling on the planet! Falling, perhaps to be burnt alive by the friction of the planet's atmosphere, perhaps to be crushed into a shapeless mass as we touched the shores of the new world! Yet we rejoiced and gave praise, and felt as the dead may feel when in their silent tombs they hear the call of the Angel of Life.

Our preparations for landing were simple in the extreme. With a few exceptions, everything that our air-boat contained was already securely fastened, and so could not be damaged in the fall; we had only ourselves to think of. We quickly moved to the south end of the projectile—the side farthest from the cone—and, holding on with both hands to the hand-rail—verily for dear life!—we waited.

How long did the waiting last? How long did we stand thus, side by side, staring blindly at each other, our senses numbed and every nerve thrilling in the unnameable suspense?

In what seemed an incredibly short space of time, the air-boat had passed from the horizontal to the vertical position, and we were now suspended, like birds on a branch, to that side of the projectile which had become the roof, while the interior of the boat lay at our feet. It was a singular position—one which at any other moment would have roused

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our sense of humour; but our appreciation of the ridiculous in life is apt to lose itself when we stand face to face with death.

So great had been my suspense, so anxious my expectation of the shock, that when it actually occurred my first impression might have been translated in the homely exclamation: *Is that all?*

The pneumatic buffer had done its work well; and before I quite realised that all was over—our landing successfully accomplished, our wonderful journey at an end,—Roy had touched a spring, and our prison doors stood open! Light, air, sunshine poured in, and for some moments, unheeding all the wonders that awaited us, we closed our eyes in silent beatitude and drank our fill of the blessed air, the blessed light, the blessed sunshine.

Then, slowly, fearfully, like some underground animals emerging from their hiding-place, we crawled to the door, and lo! the fair new world was lying at our feet!

As Roy had foreseen it, the cone of our projectile was deeply imbedded in the soft earth of the planet, and only the main body of the boat was visible, standing base upwards, its door about twenty feet above the ground. A rope ladder was promptly unrolled and fastened to the outer wall, and Roy bade me descend.

I obeyed, and had almost reached the last step when a sudden thought arrested me.

"No," I cried to Roy who, from above, was

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watching my descent; "your feet must be the first to tread this soil. Come!" And I quickly ran up and in my turn stood by the open door of the *Estrella*, watching Roy as he lightly stepped down the ladder. Then I followed, and a minute later we stood side by side on the shores of the new world,—a world fresh from the hands of God, a world which no humanity had yet watered with its tears, crimsoned with its blood, or transfigured with its dreams.

It was a wonderful moment, such as no word can tell, or pen describe. After a journey of nearly thirteen months,—thirteen months in the darkness, in the silence, in the endless void of space—thirteen months without sunshine, without light, without sight or sound of life,—to stand once more in the sunshine, and then to remember it is the sunshine of another star, another universe, so far distant from our own that its sun, with all its system of planets and satellites, has become invisible, lost in the unfathomable deserts of space. . . . What mortal language can describe this mingled pain and ecstasy?

For some time we stood silent, bareheaded in the sunlight, feeling less like conquerors of a new world than like worshippers in a new temple. The glory surrounded us, the white glory of the wonderful sun, falling silver-white on the deep gold of the forests and plains.

We found ourselves in a valley formed on either

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side by low hills, above whose summits rose in the distance the snow-crowned heads of a high range of mountains. The valley was a broad one, covered with every imaginable form of vegetation, and divided into two almost equal parts by a tempestuous river that fell in a bold sheet from one of the nearest hills. In the light of its white sun, and enveloped in an atmosphere itself purely white, with its wonderful colouring that ranged from the most delicate yellow to the deepest gold, the landscape presented so strange, so unreal an appearance that it made me feel, more vividly than ever before in our stellar expedition, that it must all be a dream—the most wonderful ever dreamt,—or else that fairyland had come to life and that Roy and I were whiling away the summer hours in a land of strange enchantments, where the foliage was of beaten gold and the flowers and fruit of precious gems.

Diamonds and topazes seemed to blossom, flower-wise, at our feet ; for instead of grass, a curious moss-shaped vegetation, pale golden in tint, carpeted the ground, bearing on every stem a small white flower that glittered like a star. Here and there rose groups of strange, five-fingered vegetals without flower, foliage, or stem, some so dwarfed as hardly to be distinguishable from the moss they grew in, others almost attaining to the height of a small tree. Their colour was a rosy white, spotted with deep orange, and from a distance, moving slowly

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to and fro in the breeze, they looked like so many hands, some of men, some of giants, lifted in welcome—or was it in warning?

After gazing for some moments at the strange spectacle, we made our way towards the forest which spread itself for many miles at the foot of the hills; and as we walked noiselessly over the carpet of gems, Roy spoke for the first time.

"What a strange silence, Clive! Not a sound of life anywhere. . . . Are we the only living creatures in this world?"

Hitherto I had been too rapt in wonderment to notice the absolute stillness that encompassed us, but at Roy's exclamation I stopped short and listened. A warm wind fanned our faces and sent faint ripples through the moss-like vegetation at our feet; it was a faint murmur, one of the least noises of nature. . . . With it mingled the distant roar of the falling river. But of life-sounds there were none: no song of birds or drone of insects, no patter of hurrying feet or whirr of flying wings. Were we alone in this strange world, alone among the golden hills and star-strewn plains?

"Perhaps there are no inhabitants?" I suggested.

"But there must be," asserted Roy, "for I have seen them! . . . At least," he corrected hastily, "there were living creatures here nineteen hundred years ago, and it is not probable that every type of animal life should have become

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extinct since that period. It is true that I never saw many, although I observed the planet with my greatest magnifying power. . . . It may be that in this world the proportion between the animal and the vegetal kingdom as it exists on Earth is reversed, and that here it is the vegetal kingdom that predominates. . . ."

"What kind of living creatures did you see on this planet?" I queried suddenly, at the same time wondering that I had never yet asked the question.

"In shape they resembled deer and antelopes, but they were purely white and wonderfully agile and graceful in all their movements. Then—but only once—I saw others, white also, that looked like small monkeys, darting in and out of the trees; but they disappeared so rapidly that my impression of them is not distinct. . . . Of course, it is possible that, for some reason or other, this valley has been deserted by its inhabitants. Still, it is strange."

As Roy spoke these last words we arrived at the edge of the forest; and as we penetrated within its golden depths I felt that no beauties this planet, or any other planet in space, might reveal to us, could ever surpass the magical splendour we now beheld.

Imagine a forest, not of trees, but of flowers, and flowers resplendent in every colour of the rainbow: some so low-growing that we could look

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into their heart and breathe their fragrance ; others almost as tall as the tallest trees on Earth, with a corolla so wide that its petals could have cradled a sleeping child as easily as a rose hides a bee within its folded leaves. Imagine a foliage the colour of amber through which the sun is shining, and stems that look like pillars of gold entwined with precious gems. Imagine every variety of form, every fantasy of structure, every caprice of colour—merge in one all the fairest descriptions of elfdom and fairyland,—and still the dream picture will be less fair than the reality, as we saw it, Roy and I, in the white sunshine of that wondrous morning.

As we penetrated deeper into the forest and approached closer to the strange flower-trees, we discovered the secret of their gem-like colouring. On Earth, as every schoolboy knows, certain objects have the property of splitting the white rays of the sun into the seven colours of the rainbow, thus clothing themselves in a many-tinted garment, fairer than a king's. The plumage of some tropical birds, for instance, although colourless in itself, reflects in dazzling iridescence the glory of the sun ; so does mother-o'-pearl, and every dewdrop which, on a fair summer morning, trembles in the grass. On close examination of the flowers within our reach, we saw that, with the exception of the white blossoms, whose velvety petals shone like new-fallen snow, every flower was a living, jewelled rainbow ; while the stems

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which bore them—of a deeper gold than the foliage—were as much a thing of beauty as the blossoms themselves, for in their close-set fibres they bore the fruit: large oval berries, some emerald green, some purple, others blue as an eastern sky or crimson-dyed as if in blood. They were imbedded in the stalk like precious stones in a pilaster of gold; some twining spirally around the stem, others forming quaint, irregular designs; and it was not the least wonder of this curious vegetation that in every variety we discovered the flowers were separated from the fruit. But then—were they flowers? The whole structure of the plants was so different from anything that grows on Earth, that our names must necessarily be at fault in describing them. Whereas in terrestrial vegetation it is the flower that bears the most important organs of the plant, and is the scented bower wherein fecundation takes place and the germ of life develops, in these strange flower-trees the blossoms seemed to be nothing but a brilliant flag hoisted on the top of the stem to catch the sunshine and the breeze; the real life of the plant was centred in the berries that bore the seeds, —flower and fruit in one. With some difficulty I detached one of these from its socket, and, in spite of Roy's warning, tasted it. It had an acid, unpleasant flavour, and its flesh was fibrous and hard.

"This is undoubtedly the Garden of Eden,

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Roy," I remarked; "but if all its fruits are like this one, they will not tempt the first woman to her fall!"

"Patience," smiled Roy. "We shall certainly find something—whether fruit, flower, or grass—that will serve us for food, as it does the inhabitants of this planet!"

"If there are any," I interposed hastily. "At present it seems a fairyland without the fairies, a Paradise deserted——"

"Hush!" said Roy. "What is this?"

I followed the direction of his gaze, and barely repressed a cry of alarm as, from behind a low bush of clustered blossoms, a pair of human eyes met mine. Human? There was man's intelligence, nay, man's cunning, between those wide-open lids, but the strange whiteness that encircled them did not belong to human flesh. The remainder of the face and the body were hidden; only the eyes were visible — watchful — intense. As Roy quickly advanced towards the hidden creature he whispered the ominous question:

"Monkey—or man?"

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CHAPTER II

MONKEY OR MAN?

THE query remained unanswered, for the moment at least. All we saw on arriving at the spot whence the creature had spied on us was an indistinct white form rapidly disappearing behind the flowering bushes. Human or not, the unknown had the fear of man. Was it instinct—or experience?

"Shall we follow him?" proposed Roy.

I promptly assented, and in pursuit of the white creature we penetrated into the very depths of the forest of flowers.

The enchantment deepened as we advanced. We were walking through a veritable tangle of blossoms, not one of them single-tinted, but all sparkling with the colours of opals in the sun. Flowers around us, above us, flowers strewn at our feet, nodding over our heads, shedding their perfume on us as we passed,—flowers everywhere, rainbow-tinted on a background of gold!

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"Roy," I exclaimed, "what name shall we give this planet? Let it be a name that signifies beauty, for verily nothing in all the world ever was, or ever shall be, so perfectly beautiful!"

"Let us call it *Kallistos*—Most Beautiful—the name given by Homer to the planet Venus."

"H'm! A classical name?"

"Why not? The ancients were worshippers of beauty, and they worshipped it with a fervour we moderns have lost. But," Roy added quickly with a bright smile, "are we moderns *now*—and *here*? If there are thinking animals in this world, and the story of our coming is handed down from generation to generation, we shall be known in all ages to come as the pre-Adamites of Kallistos!"

Disentangling our way through the wilderness of fairy flowers, we found ourselves gradually descending, by a gentle slope, towards the east, instead of ascending the knoll as we had intended. As far as we could judge we were now in that part of the forest which the lowest range of hills had hidden from our view when we landed in the valley.

After perhaps ten minutes' walk we came to an abrupt halt. At our feet, in a deep hollow formed by blue-grey rocks, was a pond—a lake almost—covered with a white-sailed flotilla of water-lilies. One might well call them by that familiar name, for they closely resembled our nenuphars, both in shape and in the texture of their petals, which were

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of that soft, velvety whiteness that seems to give forth a radiance in the moonlight. They were tall, taller than any water plant known to Earth—taller than the imperial *Victoria Regia* itself—and covered with a multitude of snowy blossoms; but these were partly closed, and lazily nodding to the ripples of the lake, as if their time for flowering had not yet come. But although I had good reason, later on, to remember these queenly blossoms, neither Roy nor I gave them more than a passing glance as we arrived at the edge of the pond; for on the opposite bank we espied, running in and out of the trees, small white creatures in human shape!

During half a minute, perhaps, curiosity held us fixed where we stood,—staring,—speechless; then Roy whispered: "Let us hide and watch them." So as slowly, as noiselessly as if we had been Red Indians on the war-path, we crept back to the shelter of the bushes. "Our turn now to see, and not to be seen," I murmured *sotto voce* as I nestled among the blossoms.

Were they monkeys? Were they men? In size they were the height of a child of ten or twelve; in shape they resembled men, but although they had the long arms characteristic of the Simian tribes, they walked erect, their cranium was well developed, and the jaws not prominent. Save for the absence of ears—at least apparent ones—their features were absolutely human; and the strangeness of their appearance was chiefly due to the snow-white fur

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that enveloped them from head to foot, leaving nothing bare but the face, which was covered with a skin as purely white as the fur itself.

It took us some time to note these details, for the creatures moved about with incredible swiftness, darting hither and thither with the winged lightness of birds. They seemed to be in pursuit of one of their companions, a creature more agile even than the others, who ran ahead, holding some brilliant object—probably a berry—clasped against his breast. Were they in play or in earnest? Were they enjoying the very human pleasure of the chase, or was the first action we were witnessing in this new world a phase of highway robbery?

It seemed likely that they would soon return into the depths of the woods, for already the quarry had disappeared behind the trees and the others were about to follow.

"Shall we show ourselves, and see what they will do?" asked Roy in a whisper.

My only answer was to start out of my hiding-place and, with Roy at my heels, run to the edge of the water. So intent were they upon their game—if it was a game—that they neither heard nor saw us, until Roy clapped his hands, when immediately every creature stood still, looking at us with eyes that seemed to grow larger and more brilliant every moment. It was irresistibly comical. Were I to attain to the legendary old age of the patriarchs, I believe I would still, at the completion of my three

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or four-hundredth year, laugh as merrily as any schoolboy at the remembrance of that scene ; and the scene itself would be painted in my memory in colours as vivid then as now. In the background the forest, deep gold beneath the silvery sun ; in the foreground fifteen or twenty snow-white creatures, each one standing, immovable, in the attitude in which it had been surprised, staring at us as would stare a troop of men on Earth if, from the clouds, a celestial visitant had suddenly dropped into their midst.

Alas for the dignity of man, messenger from a far-away world ! Truth compels me to record that our first interview with the inhabitants of Kallistos was signalised by a peal of homeric laughter—which indecorous behaviour seemed to startle the creatures even more than our miraculous appearance, for with one accord they turned their backs on us and fled !

They fled, but only to return, cautiously, creepingly, with the rampart of flowering bushes between themselves and us. Evidently their curiosity overcame their terror—which seemed to point them out as men. We could see them behind the low-growing flowers, peeping at us with brilliant eyes, a white hand sometimes showing itself amidst the opal-tinted blossoms, or a white forehead emerging from the golden bushes only to hide again with lightning rapidity.

For perhaps ten minutes we remained thus,

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immobile—watching and watched. Then I volunteered to reconnoitre the enemy. Slowly—and observing the while the eager eyes fixed upon us—we skirted the edge of the pond and began to climb the opposite bank. The creatures gave no sign of fear: still the eyes gleamed behind the bushes. We advanced farther, and now stood on a level with them, almost at the entrance of the forest; then there was a movement in the thicket, a rustle of leaves, a stampede of hurrying feet.

"Are they running away?" cried Roy, advancing more quickly.

A cry, weirdly human in its note of fear, answered him from the depths of the forest. We penetrated into the woods just in time to see the creatures flying in terror before us—all but one, that remained. It stood at barely thirty feet from us and quietly awaited our coming. The others had disappeared. It was alone.

"What does it mean?" I whispered.

Roy did not answer, but continued to advance with his eyes fixed on the motionless creature, and not until we were almost within an arm's length of it did we understand the mystery. The creature was wounded in the knee; it could stand, but could not walk.

Seen at so near a distance, the animal looked strangely, almost repulsively human; probably the extremity of its dread distorted its features: it was ugly with a weird ugliness, and its eyes had

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the fixed stare of a man in agony. As I looked at it, I almost unconsciously repeated aloud Roy's query: "A monkey—or a man?"

The sound of my voice added, if possible, to the creature's alarm. With an effort which must almost have wrenched its injured limb, it sprang to its feet, stooped, picked up a fragment of rock, and hurled it at our faces. The stone fell at Roy's feet. He turned to me with a half smile and answered my question.

"They must be men," he said.

The animal seemed to have spent all its strength in the effort; it fell heavily to the ground as in the lassitude of death. Another step brought Roy to its side; he knelt by it and laid his hand on its brow. And then a strange thing happened—it might be called a transfiguration. The creature opened its eyes in terror, its half-dormant brain anticipating God knows what awful fate, what prolonged agony, at our hands. . . . It saw Roy bending towards it in compassion—and the creature understood. It needed no word, no gesture, no caress, to convey the message of good-will. A long tremor shook the animal's frame; it heaved a deep sigh as of a sleeper awakening to life, and lo! before our eyes the brute became man—a smile parted its lips—the divine light of intelligence shone in its eyes. . . . And still Roy bent over it, his hand on its brow, and still the creature gazed up at him confidingly, as to its creator.

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At last Roy turned towards me.

"Shall we carry him to the *Estrella* and dress his wound?"

I hesitated. Interested though I was in the strange creature—and in Roy's influence over it—yet I could not altogether conquer my repugnance; but Roy was my leader in all things, and—somewhat churlishly, perhaps—I assented.

When I approached the creature it showed signs of renewed fear and turned to Roy as if imploring his protection; then, seeing I came not to injure but to help, it let its hand lie passively in my grasp. It tolerated my presence and my touch: Roy alone had the power to call the smile to its lips, and the human look into its eyes.

And thus, burdened with the wounded animal, which we sometimes carried, sometimes merely helped on the road, we returned to the *Estrella*—still our shelter, our home, in this beautiful strange world—*un coin de la patrie* in a far-away universe.

The creature's surprise at the sight of our air-boat was amusing to witness, but—and this spoke well for its degree of intelligence—it almost immediately connected its presence in the valley with the arrival of the two wonderful beings from another world, for it pointed to it and then to us, as if to ask: Has this also dropped from the clouds with you?

Arrived at the foot of the *Estrella*, we had a moment's hesitation as we wondered how best to

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convey our charge up the ladder ; but the creature was not as helpless as we had deemed it. Seeing Roy mount the first step, it grasped the situation in a moment, and, evidently determined not to be parted from its protector, it immediately followed, lifting itself from rung to rung with the sole help of its hands.

At the doors of the *Estrella* new difficulties confronted us, for our once comfortable cabined home was now, owing to the vertical position assumed by the projectile, transformed into a sort of pit, wherein the walls had been changed into floor and ceiling, and not a single object occupied its normal position. But this difficulty was soon overcome, as we had another rope-ladder in reserve, and this we fixed inside the boat in the same manner as the first one had been fastened outside, so that we were able easily to ascend and descend, and reach the different parts of the projectile. With this arrangement we had to be content until we were able to set free the *Estrella* and place her once more in an horizontal position ; this we knew would be no easy task, in spite of the powerful electrically-worked levers that formed an all-important part of our machinery.

Once settled—if this word can apply to our novel position—in the pit of the *Estrella*, we played in all conscientiousness our rôle of good Samaritans ; we dressed and bandaged the creature's wound, which appeared to have been caused by running

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against, or falling on, some sharp projection of rock, probably in the mad hurry of flight. The animal followed our movements with the curiosity of a child that tries hard to understand what is taking place about him ; but there was undoubted gratitude in his little grunts of satisfaction when the cool bandage was tied around his knee and he was made to lie down on a blanket with a pillow under his head. For some time curiosity kept him awake, watching us intently ; then, slowly, fitfully, the eyelids fell over the tired eyes and the creature slept.

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CHAPTER III

THE FRUIT OF PARADISE

It was now noonday on the planet. We had been wandering for over three hours in the forests of the new world; and though excitement had hitherto kept us from feeling either fatigue or hunger, we became suddenly conscious of both, our terrestrial bodies prosaically reminding us that we had as yet partaken of neither breakfast nor luncheon. Yet the idea of the compressed food and dry biscuits we had subsisted on for over a year was not a tempting one; while we were imprisoned within the iron walls of our projectile, it had seemed part of the inexorable necessity regulating all our actions, that we should renounce the pleasures of the table and, for thirteen months, live cheerfully on a diet of tasteless tablets. But here, in this exhilarating air, in the crisp freshness of the morning, one's body—I had almost said one's soul—revolted against it. It seemed a challenge to Nature, a sin against the blossoming earth that stretched away, as far

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as the eye could follow it, in a splendour of vitality; but, alas, we had not yet learnt to eat flowers, however magnificent, nor moss, though it shone like gold in the sun, and we were likely to starve in this Garden of Eden!

"Do you think people ever eat on this planet, Roy?" I asked wistfully, as I stretched myself on the metal floor.

Roy laughed. "Does this mean that you are hungry? So am I."

"Yes, I am hungry, but not for *that*," I declared emphatically, as Roy handed me the box of tablets.

"Ah, you must be content with these for the present," said Roy good-humouredly; "for since you believe this to be Paradise, we shall soon discover the forbidden fruit."

"And eat it?"

"O Clive! When has the forbidden fruit *not* been eaten—and enjoyed? Have a little patience, and in the meanwhile take your compressed food and be thankful."

I obeyed the first, but not the second part of this injunction, and munched my tablets and biscuits with tempting visions rising before me of some princely banquet in ancient Rome. . . .

The murmur of our voices had not disturbed our little guest; the creature slept on, its white face turned to the light, its arms thrown back in the careless attitude of a tired child.

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"What shall you do with it?" I asked Roy in an undertone.

"Keep him," answered Roy promptly, "unless he prefers to return to his people."

"You speak of it as if it were a man," I remarked with a smile.

"I believe him to be one," said Roy, quite seriously; "and so we will not say *it*, if you please, in speaking of him, but presently we shall give him a name—some simple vowelled word, that he can easily remember,—that is, if he has not a name already."

"Are you serious, Roy?" I could not help asking.

"Quite serious. Unless I am greatly mistaken, this little creature represents the dawn of humanity on this planet, and thus is more interesting, in my eyes, than any other object, animate or inanimate, which this world may contain."

"Granted, if he be a man, but of this I am not yet convinced."

The words had scarcely left my lips when the creature awoke with an uneasy start and, not immediately recollecting where and with whom he was, sat up and looked about him in evident consternation. Then his glance fell on Roy, and he remembered. He touched the bandage on his knee, put his head a little on one side, looked piteous and heaved a deep sigh; then gravely

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nodded his head at us as if to say : "It was well done. I am satisfied."

There was a strange mixture of pathos and drollery in all his movements. . . . And Roy then and there christened him Lalou.

I was still holding a biscuit in my hand, and with a propitiatory smile I offered it to our little guest ; he hesitated in taking it, evidently failing to appreciate the value of the gift. I then proceeded to demonstrate its use by the universal language of signs. Biting a small bit off, I munched it with a great show of delight, then graciously renewed my offer. This time it was understood, and the creature took the biscuit from my hand ; in his turn he bit a little, a very little piece off—looked surprised—then displeased —and finally shook his head several times with a decided grunt of disapproval.

"Try him with something else," suggested Roy. "A little compressed food, perhaps——?"

Beyond a severe glance, I did not answer this evil suggestion, but continued my well-meant efforts at hospitality. Some vividly-coloured berries that I had gathered in the forest were offered next ; these he seemed immediately to recognise ; but when it dawned upon him that they were brought forward as articles of food, he looked so unmistakably offended that I deemed it wise not to renew my offer.

It was now his turn to instruct us in the matter

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of diet. Looking up, he saw the wide opening of the door—now transformed into a skylight—through which entered a dazzling ray of white sunshine. Immediately he rose, not without some difficulty; but with the help of Roy he reached the foot of the ladder, and once more ascended it, monkey-wise, with his hands. I followed him. Arrived at the door, he sat himself comfortably on the ledge, and turning to me, repeatedly pointed to some object in the valley. I looked in the direction he indicated, but saw nothing beyond the amber moss with its little star-like blossoms, and the curious finger-shaped plants that waved slowly to and fro in the breeze.

"Perhaps he sees some of his companions?" suggested Roy, who was watching us from below.

My eyes scanned the valley on all sides, but discovered no trace of animal life. With evidently increasing impatience the creature repeated his imperative gesture, and, seeing I remained motionless, gave vent to a prolonged guttural sound—probably his first efforts at speech: "Oûll! oûll!" Then, in evident despair at my stupidity, and as a last effort to make his meaning clear, he opened his right hand, his five fingers extended, and moved it rapidly to and fro before my face, while with his left he still pointed to the valley. A light broke upon me.

"Can it be," I cried to Roy, "that he means

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us to gather some of those white and yellow plants shaped like a hand?"

"If he does," replied Roy promptly, "then his intelligence is indeed human!"

"Ay, and it shames us, who have taken so long to understand him!"

As I spoke I hurriedly climbed down the outside ladder, and, running to the nearest bushes, I gathered an armful of the smallest and freshest-looking finger-plants. Truly there was no lack of warmth in the little creature's welcome when, thus laden, I returned to the *Estrella*! Hardly leaving me time to quit the ladder, he seized the first plant he could lay his hand on, and bit into its firm white flesh with a childlike grin of delight.

Needless to say, I lost no time in following his example, nor was I long in approving his taste and sharing his greedy pleasure. The fruit—if fruit this curious plant could be called—was the most delicious I had ever tasted. As sweet as desert-grown dates, its flesh as mellow as a well-ripened pear, it had a flavour far surpassing that of the finest peaches or nectarines ever grown in the sunny South.

"Hurrah, Roy!" I cried gaily, as I ran down the ladder into the interior of the *Estrella*. "The fruit of Paradise is discovered at last!"

"And to whom do we owe the discovery?" asked Roy, half smiling, half serious.

Involuntarily I glanced at our singular little

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protégé, who, still squatting at the door, partly inside, partly out, was enjoying his fruit, and from time to time staring at us, with his head on one side and a most comically wise look in his brilliant eyes.

"Behold," I said solemnly, pointing my finger at him, "behold the serpent that gave me the fruit whereof I eat!"

Is there some truth, I wonder, in that wicked saying about the short cut to the heart of man? To confess a plain fact, at that moment my aversion to our little comrade vanished as a mist in the sun, and I felt quite ready, at Roy's bidding, to welcome him as my fellow-creature—my brother-man in a far-way universe.

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CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN-FLOWER

HEN, some hours later, I awoke from a refreshing sleep, I looked about me in amazement. Instead of the dazzling, almost crude brilliance of the noonday sun, silver white in a white sky, a soft, deep blue light entered the wide-open doors, enveloping us as in a cloud of azure. Roy was lying beside me on the floor, fast asleep, his head resting on his arm in an attitude of perfect repose. Unwilling to disturb him, I rose softly and climbed up the ladder to the door, where our little friend still sat in patient immobility. . . . And as I glanced at the valley below and the sky above, I understood the mystery.

Overcome with fatigue after our many anxious days and sleepless nights, and probably intoxicated by the crisp air of the planet, that tasted so strong and sweet after our long imprisonment, we had slept, undisturbed, through the slow hours of the afternoon and evening; and now the sun had set

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and it was night. Night! A night that mocked the name, a night illumined by four moons—two white, one yellow, and one sapphire blue!

One of the white moons was visible only as a small silvery crescent; the other—the most distant of all the satellites—shone in a cluster of stars overhead, itself only a little larger than a star of the first magnitude; but the yellow moon was newly risen above the snow-clad mountains, crowning them with its pale light; while the nearest and largest satellite, a magnificent azure-tinted orb, was poised in the zenith, shedding its warm radiance, like a luminous dew, over the silent valley.

After gazing for some time in rapt admiration at the wonderful scene, I could no longer resist the temptation of roaming in this new fairyland, and, with a friendly nod to the little creature who was eagerly watching all my movements, I swung myself down the ladder and stepped on to the soft flowering moss that covered the earth.

Gods! What mortal voice can tell, what human pen describe, the magic of this wondrous night? We had named this world the "Planet Beautiful" when first we beheld it basking in the noonday resplendence of its silver-white sun. . . . By what name should we hail it now, as it lay asleep in the azure and amber light of its peerless moons? Asleep, did I say? It was awake and throbbing with life in its innermost recesses!

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As I gazed, I understood why the great silence of Nature alone had greeted us on our arrival—why this Paradise had seemed a desert. Not day, but night, was the time of wakefulness and teeming life. Not in the glare of the silvery sun, but in the soft illumination of the blue, and white, and golden moons, did the birds build their nests and serenade their mates, the winged insects visit the flowers, the creatures of the forest peep out from their leafy hiding-places and rejoice because the day was past and the splendour of the night was dawning.

All the valley was awake. White fantastic forms flitted to and fro among the bushes, large swan-like birds sailed in the luminous sky, and under the dome of the near forest an invisible choir made the night beautiful with song. There was life everywhere, in heaven and on earth, stirring in the plains and over the hills, hiding in every small plant that blossomed at my feet.

As I unconsciously wended my way towards the forest, the distant and vague concert resolved itself into a melody so penetratingly sweet, a harmony so joyfully triumphant, that all I can say of it is that it made the human soul feel itself immortal.

The serenade began with a high, prolonged note, as melodious as the prelude of a nightingale beneath the forest arches; then another note, prolonged also and tender, answered it from a distance, then

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another, and yet another, in alternate keys, forming a quatuor, sedate and slow like a minuet song of olden days. Then over the distant hills, far away, arose the chorus, a multitude of voices, an ocean of sound, coming ever nearer until its vast crescendo filled all the spaces above.

Entranced, I walked on and on, unconscious of my movements, indifferent to my course, guided by the invisible songsters towards the very heart of the forest, penetrating deeper and deeper into its depths of living gems, beneath its cathedral arches of trellised gold, deeper and deeper, walking as a man in a trance, with eyes half closed and all my senses numbed in a languor of delight.

How luminously blue shone the full moon overhead! How softly filtered the light through the flowered dome, resting lovingly on the iridescent corollas, awakening each petal into new life! How lavishly every blossom shed its perfume, as from a priceless flask, into the song-filled night! A fragrance as of new-created things rose from the earth—the warm rich earth that was fresh from the hands of God,—and I wandered on and on, my humanity dropping from me as a worn-out garment as my soul rose within me and rejoiced, and lost itself in the Universal Life.

I awoke from my dream to find myself standing on the edge of the lake we had visited that morning, the lake on whose silvery surface white water-lilies

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"How luminously blue shone the full moon overhead!"

Around a Distant Star

To face p. 178

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slept through the long hours of the day. But now the day was past, and they had awakened at the first touch of the moon's rays, unfolding their petals like a woman unveiling at the coming of her lover.

As I looked deep down into the heart of the flower, the sweet lines of Heine on the Mystic Lotus seemed to be borne on the breeze :—

"Die Lotus Blume ängstigt
Sich vor der Sonne Pracht,
Und mit gesenktem Haupte
Erwartet Sie träumend die Nacht.

"Der Mond, der ist Ihr Buhle,
Erweckt Sie mit seinem Licht,
Und Ihm entschleiert Sie freundlich
Ihr frommes Blumengesicht. . . ."

What was there in the words of this dainty song that seemed so strangely, so weirdly suggestive of the royal blossoms unfolding at my feet? *Ihr frommes Blumengesicht!* And as I mused, and dreamt, in a sudden flash of recognition I saw the wondrous "flower-face," the *Blumengesicht* of the poet, smiling at me above the calm surface of the lake.

For one moment I stood mutely entranced, gazing deep, deep into the heart of the flower, as a man looks into the face of the woman he loves. . . . The face of the woman he loves! . . . Were not these her eyes, her lips, her smile? . . . Into

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what dreamland had I wandered—what magic world of elves, and fairies, and women in flower shape?

'Twas a woman's face, or else my sight was vision-distorted, my brain reeling towards madness; 'twas a woman's face that rose above the calm blue waters, hidden in the very heart of the lily, yet half revealed by every ripple of the lake, as the outer petals opened slowly to the caress of the moon. . . . My heart beat tumultuously. . . . I took a step forward to assure myself of the reality of my vision—another step—and another—and I stood at the very verge of the water. There, rising from the nearest blossoms, a perfume, potent as midnight spell of witches, entangled me further into the web of ecstasy. My head swam, a delicious languor, as of self-surrender to a beloved one, overpowered all my senses as, half unconscious, I approached the silvery blossoms. . . . Slowly my feet sank in the moist earth. . . . I walked on. The water mirrored my face. . . . I walked on. Softly the warm ripples played about my ankles. . . . I walked on—on to the wondrous face, the wondrous smile half hidden in the flower. . . . Almost I touched its velvet leaves. . . . Its perfume was as new wine in my veins. Almost . . . almost . . . Something stopped me short—the feeling, perhaps, that I was no longer free. . . . The water now reached to my knees, and suddenly my feet felt chained, chained far below, beyond

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reach. . . . Instinctively I tried to step back—I could not. Then, with a horror passing through my hair like an icy breath, I felt the invisible chains creep up, up, binding my ankles, tightening around my knees, dragging me down—Ah, invisible no longer! With a gasp almost of relief, I saw a long, sinuous arm, in shape like a branch made of human flesh, that crept up slowly through the water to encircle my waist. With frantic efforts I strove to fight against it, but the thing was strong as evil, and still crept up with the quiet, relentless movement of a snake coiling around its prey. . . .

Ah, the horrors of that fight against the unknown! Shall I ever forget it, at night, when I lie awake and once more feel the pressure of that demon-arm, soft to the touch as a woman's hand, yet all-powerful to kill?

My wild efforts at deliverance had ceased. My strength was flowing from me like blood from a wound. . . . And still the eyes, the eyes in the death-flower, looked into mine. . . . Yes, I knew it with a sudden intuition: it was the flower that killed! If so, who could prevail against her might? Woman—and flower—and beautiful as both?

My thoughts wandered into a dreamy quietude. I thought I saw Estrella's face looking at me with a sad smile—or was it the smile of the Lotus? The coil tightened around my heart,

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the calm waters of the lake seemed suddenly to rise above my head, and I slowly sank into nothingness.

. . . . . .

I opened my eyes to a white, all-pervading glare, with the dim remembrance of moonlit forests and soft, azure rays on the petals of water-lilies. What a wonderful dream this had been! How fantastic, and yet how vivid! With half-closed, aching eyes, I glanced about me. I was lying on the golden moss of the valley wherein the *Estrella* had landed. The *Estrella* itself was within sight, its brilliant aluminium surface, lit by the morning sun, giving it the appearance of some strangely-shaped tower of silver rising from a bed of gold; and, most welcome sight of all, there was Roy standing by the edge of the stream, filling a cup with the cool, clear water of the hills.

When he turned towards me and saw that I was awake, his face lit with sudden joy, and a cry of gladness broke from his lips: "Thank God, Clive!"

My wonder increased at these words, while a curious feeling of uneasiness crept over me—a vivid remembrance of that horror in my dream, those fleshy branches that had encircled me and dragged me down. . . . And then I saw that Roy's hands and arms were bandaged, and that his face was haggard.

"Roy, what is it?" I queried eagerly. "What

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has happened? Oh, I have had a hideous dream! A dream of a flower—a flower with a woman's face—lips that smiled—eyes as fair as Estrella's! A flower that kills, that drags its victims slowly down into the mire of the lake. . . . The dream was so vivid, I can almost feel the deadly clasp of those branches around my heart!"

Roy stretched towards me his bandaged hands.

"It was no dream," he said quietly.

I gasped for breath. My head swam.

"No dream? Roy, can it be? Why, man, it must have been a dream! Those things do not happen save in dreamland! Or else — what world is this? A world of gnomes, of fairies, of women in flower-shape? Heavens, Roy, if it was not a dream, then I am mad, or soon shall be!"

Roy bent over me and moistened my forehead with the cold water.

"Listen," he said gently. "You are not mad, and it was not a dream. I followed you last night. I think the noise you made in stepping down the ladder awoke me, for when I looked out I saw you about to enter the forest beyond the stream. I called you, but you were already too far to hear me. My first impulse was to join you in a moonlight walk; my second thought was one of anxiety at seeing you venture out alone, unarmed, in an unknown country—an unknown world—and into a forest which, for all we knew, might be peopled

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by far worse denizens than any wild beast ever known to Earth. I took my revolver and followed as quickly as I could. Clive, some good angel must have shown me the way, else I might have wandered in the woods until daybreak, and never come across your track! Yet I evidently followed you almost step by step, for in less than twenty minutes I found myself standing on the verge of the pond—the pond of the white water-lilies. And then—my hair stood on end as I saw you in mid-water, among the lilies, a terror in your eyes, a curious rigidity in your limbs. I called to you: you did not answer me; not a flicker of an eyelid betrayed a sign of recognition—of life. I leapt into the water, I caught hold of you, and then——"

A slight shudder passed through Roy's frame as, for a moment, he was silent, looking away from me.

"And then?" I asked impatiently.

"I saw the face," Roy answered in a low voice. "I saw the face in the flower, a woman's face, beautiful as a dream! . . . And beyond the face I saw the embracing arms, and, far below the surface, strange skeletons half hidden in the ooze. . . . It was this discovery that saved our lives, else I must have been overpowered, as you were, by the wonderful, indefinable fragrance that seemed to emanate from every petal of the flower. . . . But the imminence of our danger—above all, the horror of that death—lashed me into clear-headedness.

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With all my strength I tore at those arms that were holding you fast: I might as well have attempted to break a piece of iron between my fingers! Soft to the touch as human flesh, were they not? Yet beneath this softness, what demon's power!

"My revolver was of no avail, but I had my knife with me. Feeling my strength ebbing away with every second that passed, I began to hack and tear away like a madman, right and left, cutting with one hand, wrenching with the other. . . . I hardly know myself how I set you free at last, how, one by one, the tentacles were torn from your flesh. One had woven itself around my feet; my hands were shaking so that I became clumsier every minute. . . . I wounded both myself and you in the struggle. . . . You have not noticed your bandaged knee? Why, my poor Clive," he added with a smile, "we both look like soldiers returning from the wars!"

I shuddered. The horror of the night was still upon me, and in spite of Roy's explanation I felt hopelessly bewildered.

"And so you think, Roy—you think this plant—but was it a plant?" I asked suddenly.

Roy was some time answering my question.

"It was a plant," he said at last, musingly, "in form and colour not unlike the great water-lilies we know on Earth. You noticed the velvety heart-shaped petals, the deep golden centre, the smooth

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flat leaves spread out like rafts on the surface of the water? Yes, a plant, distinctly a plant; and, were it not for the golden tint of its foliage, an almost faithful copy of our own *Victoria Regia.*"

"Why, Roy! How can you say that? Have you forgotten the arms that dragged us down? Have you forgotten the face, the lips that smiled, the eyes that drew us on—on—to death?"

"Ah, the face, I confess, is still a mystery! I have thought of it, dreamed of it, all night! Was it a subjective vision—an illusion created, in some mysterious way, by the potent perfume of the flower? I can hardly believe it. Was it a chance combination of the innermost petals with the stamen or pistil, that bore some likeness to a human face, a likeness immediately exaggerated by our own heated fancy? I am half inclined to think so, and moreover——"

"But, Roy, I saw the eyes—the lips——"

"So did I. But you know we see many things that do not really exist; and you must remember that we were neither of us in a normal condition at the time. There is something in the perfume of the flower that weakens the strongest man, and transforms the sanest into a seer of visions and dreamer of dreams!"

I touched Roy's bandaged hands.

"Was this a vision?" I queried, "was this a dream?"

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Roy smiled.

"Not a dream, this—no; but neither is it a mystery. The plant is evidently carnivorous—many plants are, even on Earth. There is a tropical plant—I forget its name—that subsists chiefly on insects and small birds; its petals are so constructed as to form a veritable prison-house for any bird that may have been tempted to enter it, and the little creature is slowly assimilated—literally eaten—by the plant. But this 'woman in flower-shape,' as you call it, murders in another way. It has flexible roots, or tentacles, I might say, instead of roots, and these do the deadly work. Distinctly last night I saw the snake-like things rise noiselessly, cautiously, as it were, out of the water, then with a swift movement coil themselves around their prey. Yes, this water-lily with the soft white petals, this beautiful lotus dreaming under the moon-rays, is a flesh-eater, like we of Earth. It has eaten animals until now, and, to judge from our last night's adventure, when there are men on Kallistos it will eat men!"

I could not help a smile at the matter-of-fact tone of Roy's explanation. But to my mind, even when viewed in this prosaic light, there was still something weird, uncanny, elfin-like, in the idea of a beautiful plant that killed so ruthlessly, even while it lifted to the moon its serene flower-face. I secretly determined that, no matter what dangers

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might lurk in my path, I would discover its secret ere another day had passed ; but Fate had decreed that the mystery of the woman-flower should remain a mystery always, for, little as we dreamt it that night, on the morrow we were to leave, perhaps for ever, the beautiful valley wherein we had landed after our journey across Space.

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CHAPTER V

DESPAIR

LL that day Roy busied himself with his machines, unpacking, piece by piece, the great telescope, the continuous-current dynamo, and all the various instruments necessary to a study of the heavens. I helped him in his work so far as my inexperience would allow me, and felt almost as impatient as he did for the coming of the night, when, if the sky were cloudless, we would see our native planet as clearly as once, on Earth, we had seen Kallistos, shining like some colossal moon in the deserts of space.

There seemed little fear of our hopes being thwarted by the inopportune appearance of clouds, for although they were not unknown to Kallistos, since its meteorological conditions were almost identical to those prevailing on Earth, yet so radiantly transparent had been the atmosphere since our landing on the planet, that rain and mist seemed only to exist as a remote possibility.

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Nor were we deceived in our hopeful forecast. When the white sun set in glory behind the distant hills, the turquoise moon, queen of the heavens, sailed in a crystal-clear sky, while the stars shone in their myriads—

> "Symbols divine,
> Manifestations of that beauteous life
> Diffused unseen throughout eternal space."

It was a perfect night, a night for words of love or deeds of wonder. Alas!

The telescope, with the dynamo attached to it, stood in readiness on a strip of level land, at some distance from the *Estrella*, and Roy was about to establish the current, when he noticed that one of the glass insulators of the electric machine was missing. I volunteered to go back to the *Estrella* to find it.

Although the distance to the air-boat was insignificant, I was some time on my errand; I happened to search the wrong case for the insulator, and only after I had turned out the contents of one box of instruments did I find what I was seeking in another. When, ten or twelve minutes later, I returned to our open-air observatory, I saw with surprise that the dynamo was already in motion, and that Roy stood at the telescope in an attitude of extreme attention.

"Ah, Roy," I exclaimed laughingly from a distance, "this is hardly fair, you know! While I am toiling over there to find this famous

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insulator, you steal a march on me? Do let me have a look, Roy, at the Earth, only just a glance, or I shall die!"

Roy did not answer me. I came nearer. I waited for a moment, consumed with impatience, then spoke again: "Well, can you see it, Roy—the Earth, I mean? Can you see it?"

Once more I repeated my question. Still Roy did not answer, and seemingly did not hear me. I glanced at him with a sudden premonition of evil.

"Roy," I said quietly, and touched his arm.

May God in His mercy spare me another sight of so much misery written in a human face!

The eyes Roy turned towards me were those of a hunted creature; the features were aged beyond recognition; the lips bloodless and trembling with unspoken words. Half maddened myself with fear, I caught him in my arms as if he had been a little child.

"Roy, what is it? For God's sake, Roy, answer me! What has happened?"

With difficulty his lips shaped the words.

"It is finished. It is over. It is—all over—it is——"

The last words were lost in an indistinguishable murmur.

"Roy, for pity's sake," I pleaded once more, "answer me! What has happened?"

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He had freed himself from my arms, and now stared at me as if pondering my question.

"What has happened?" he repeated, slowly. "Oh, nothing—only—the Earth is not visible, cannot be visible—and all my work is in vain."

Without, as yet, fully realising all that these words implied, I felt that the irreparable had come. Instinctively I strove to minimise the terror that hung over us by shaping it into words.

"But, Roy," I hazarded, speaking as calmly as I could, "do you mean to say that the Earth is not visible—never will be visible? But how can this be? Surely, Roy, there must be a mistake, somewhere—I cannot understand——"

For the first time in his life, perhaps, Roy's self-control suddenly gave way. A nerve seemed to have snapped in his brain. He bounded towards me, and with wild eyes peered close into my face.

"You do not understand? You do not understand?" he gasped, in a voice that was so low as to be almost indistinct, yet had all the violence of a shriek. "God! It is easy to understand! We are in the northern instead of the southern latitude, and the Earth is no more visible from here than the Southern Cross is visible from England!"

I drew back a step, reeling under the blow. For some moments I felt stunned, utterly unable to think, conscious only of Roy's quick steps about me as he walked to and fro with that fevered

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motion of animals when they are caged, and men when they despair.

Slowly the full meaning of his words filtered through the numbness of my brain. We were in the northern instead of the southern hemisphere. The Earth, with all our solar system, must ever remain invisible to us, and Roy's dream—that wondrous dream woven of sun and stars—the dream of the resurrection of the past, must end in nothingness.

So intimately had I become acquainted with Roy's every thought, that I felt the despair of his defeat almost as he felt it himself, for I knew that in spite of the unbelievable wonders he had achieved, in spite of his conquest of Time and Space, if we could not, from our landing-stage in infinity, witness Earth's greatest tragedy, our journey yet spelt defeat—irreparable—absolute. To have conquered space with a miracle of human ingenuity and patience, to have annihilated distance by the harnessing of the most stupendous force known to Nature, to have bridged over the abysmal depths of creation and successfully landed on a planet situated at the very confines of the Universe—all this was as nothing to Roy. It was but a step towards a goal, and that goal had finally eluded us.

I stared at Roy helplessly, all my being rising in revolt against the inevitable.

"Roy," I stammered at last "are you quite

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certain — is there no way — can nothing be done——?"

He stopped abruptly in his fevered pacing.

"Yes, one thing—and I shall do it: go to the southern hemisphere."

The hope raised by his words flickered out as a spark when I remembered the size of Kallistos, and the impossibility to cover great distances in an unknown, uninhabited world. It was as if, on Earth, a man decided to walk round the world—a world in its first period of existence, with no mechanical means of locomotion, no vessels to traverse the seas, no beasts of burden to cross the vast stretches of the deserts.

And then—but the mere idea was madness! I knew that unless Roy's arithmetic was entirely at fault, we had landed only just in time to witness the last days of Christ's ministry on Earth. How, then, could we cover in a sufficiently short time the enormous distance—the wildernesses of land and sea—that separated us from the southern hemisphere?

I looked at Roy in silence, not daring to utter my thoughts aloud. If there were even one moment's respite in that dream, it would be cruel to awaken him. His head sunk in his hands, his whole attitude one of utter abandonment, he leant forward on the now useless dynamo, immovable, rigid, as if the two were one—silent machine and defeated toiler.

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And the night was soft and balmy, and the flowery spaces filled with song, as if no human tragedy had suddenly thrust itself into this Garden of Eden !

I took Roy's hand in mine, and the spell of silence was broken. As a wail his voice rose in the song-laden night.

"Fool !" he cried hoarsely. "Fool that I have been ! Fool ! Fool !"

Even then, in the complete bewilderment of my thoughts, it struck me that almost any other man, lured on, as Roy had been, to the uppermost heaven, only to be dashed down at the gateway of his dream, would have railed at the gods, at destiny, at the blind, dumb, relentless power that grips the souls of men like toys in its hands, and crushes them in mirthless jest. But Roy accused himself only, and no word of revolt had yet passed his lips. . . . And then, like a cool hand laid on a fevered brow, there came to me the thought that he was greater thus, in his hour of defeat, than many a world-belovëd hero in the first flush of victory.

His head still resting on his hands, as if the burden of his thoughts were too heavy for his strength, he spoke at last connectedly, and in somewhat calmer tones :

"Of course you know—every schoolboy knows, —that the orbit of a planet is never a perfect circle, but always a more or less elongated ellipse. At

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times a planet is nearer, at times it is farther from its central sun, and the nearer it is to the sun the more rapid becomes this movement of translation. Blind fool that I was! I determined—as I thought with utmost care—this movement of translation, so as to find the exact position which the planet would assume in nineteen hundred years, yet I entirely overlooked the all-important fact of the variability of this movement! When I determined the planet's velocity it was—I remember it now! —at its aphelion, consequently in its period of least velocity. Starting from this variable velocity as if it was an immutable one, I solved all my problems on this wrong basis; and it is a wonder—yes, a wonder and a miracle—that my folly, my madness, did not lead us—God knows where—to some other planet, or sun, or far-away system of space! I showed you, when on Earth, the exact spot where I intended to land. It did seem, on first stepping on this soil, as if the valley wore an unfamiliar look, totally different from the hills and plains I had so often studied with my telescope. Yet even this did not open my eyes! Fool! Fool!"

I understood. As usual, one little mistake, one moment's forgetfulness, had set at naught man's labours—his ingenuity, his science, his genius. We were snared, caged, bound hand and foot, made helpless as little children in the grasp of Destiny. We who had crossed abysms of space

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such as no human mind could conceive, were foiled at last by a few strips of land, impassable barrier between ourselves and victory.

The sight of our air-boat maddened me—the thought that it contained a latent velocity which could carry us in less than one second to any part of the planet, and that this tremendous force must remain dormant, useless, while we crawled, like animals, on the face of the earth.

Ah, how I tried, with my untrained, unscientific mind, to find some way of applying this force to our purpose, striving madly to succeed where Roy had failed!

The swiftest means of locomotion ever discovered by man were at our service, giving us command over infinite space, allowing us to fly with more than lightning speed from planet to planet, from star to star; yet a few thousand miles from us stood our goal, and we were powerless to attain it.

True, Roy had declared his intention of walking to the southern hemisphere, but—was he quite sane when he spoke those words?

"Roy," I asked hesitatingly, after some moments' oppressive silence, "you don't really mean, do you, to walk the distance——"

"To the southern hemisphere? There is nothing else to do. But, Clive, you must let me go alone. You are not very strong, and the hardships on the way will be great. If all goes well with me,

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I may return in about six months' time. If not——"

"I don't understand you, Roy!" I exclaimed, somewhat hastily. "Of course I shall follow you, wherever you go! It is not a question of strength: it would require far more strength—of mind and body—to remain here alone than to go with you to the end of the world. But I fail to see the possibility of this journey,—or even, laying that aside, since nothing appears impossible to you, I do not see its *raison d'être.* Long before we left Earth I understood that not a day, not an hour, was to be lost if you wished to see—what we have come to see. Yet you say it must take you many months—I should have said years—to pass from one latitude to another——"

"No," interrupted Roy, "I believe the journey could be accomplished in a little over two months."

"Walking the distance?" I asked incredulously.

"Part of the way only, else of course it would be impossible. You remember the map of Kallistos I showed you once in my study at home?"

"Yes, I remember it. I wondered at the time that you should have taken so much trouble in noting the smallest details——"

"And do you remember," Roy continued thoughtfully, "your first impression of it—that it

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looked somewhat like the maps of Mars in my *Popular Astronomy*?"

"Because of the many canals, or what looked like canals? Yes!"

"Then you know that one of the chief features in this planet's geography is its great numbers of rivers, wide and deep, flowing in an almost straight line from north to south. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we are close to one of these rivers, a river that in all probability has its source in the nearest range of mountains. Now I believe that without exception every river of this planet possesses a current of exceeding swiftness, and the river I am thinking of is almost a rapid throughout its course—unless something has happened in the last nineteen hundred years to alter its tide. So the simplest, indeed the only, thing to do is to construct a raft and trust ourselves to Providence—and the river."

"It seems easy," I remarked, after some moments' reflection; "but then everything seems easy, when you suggest it. And you say this river would take us the greater part of the way?"

"Yes, by far the greater part; and you must remember that we need not go to the Antipodes to see our solar system. At the twenty-fifth degree of latitude our earth should become visible—unless I am wrong, once more, in my calculations. . . . I must see to-morrow. At present my mind is a blank."

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"And you think it will not take us more than ten weeks or so, to accomplish the journey?"

"About that—perhaps less."

"So I was mistaken after all?" I queried eagerly. "Two or three months will make no difference to you? Yet I thought——"

The sight of Roy's haggard face, the visible efforts he made to speak calmly, even hopefully, ought to have checked the foolish question.

"No difference?" he repeated slowly. "Have I not told you—But you know it! You know every moment is precious! Unless every scriptural authority is at fault, it is this very month that the drama of Calvary will be enacted on Earth. Don't you understand?" he continued in more and more excited tones—and the inward fever lit a strange fire in his eyes—"Don't you see? It is but the faintest hope—one chance against a thousand! But even if it were less—oh, if there were no hope at all, still I would go! If this fails, perhaps there is another star—somewhere—but no—there is none—and human life is too short! Oh, I have tried to scale the Heavens, and——"

He threw up his arms in a sudden gesture of appeal, and fell face downwards on the ground.

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CHAPTER VI

PILGRIMS

THE hours that followed were a long agony of suspense. Throughout the night Roy lay in a torpor broken only by intervals of delirium, when he would suddenly start on his couch, peer about him with blind eyes and shout: "Clive! Clive! Are you ready? We must start: it is time. The stars do not wait. They roll on—on—for ever—in the silence, in the night, eternally, without beginning, without end. . . . And I am alone, Clive, alone against them! Oh, Clive, dear friend, make haste! Come now, come to-night,—or we shall be too late!"

Tortured almost beyond endurance, I tended him with such little medical skill as I possessed, constantly renewing the cold bandages on his head, and from time to time forcing a calming potion between his parched lips. But, even to myself, I dared not name the fear that paralysed me, body and mind.

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Defeat seemed to be closing around us like a net. Roy was the head, the will, the power. . . . If he fell—— My brain reeled at the thought. I closed my eyes, mentally, and refused to look at the morrow. I had not the strength to pray, but my every thought was a dumb cry for help—the piteous appeal of the human creature when it stands, brain-sick and wounded, on the verge of the abyss, and cries to its Maker: Thou who hast created me, O Lord God, have pity!

As if by miracle, Roy lived—and was sane. In the morning all the hideous visions of the night—brain fever, madness, death—lifted like a fog at the coming of the sun.

He lived, but hope was dead within him. Yet he continued the struggle with all the heroic folly of some legendary knight who, losing blood by a hundred wounds, still fights on, stubbornly, to victory through death.

His first question on regaining consciousness was: "Are you ready, Clive? It is time: we must start!" So like were these words to the raving of his delirium that all my fears returned, and for some moments I watched his face in anxious suspense; but a minute or two later he added in a quiet voice: "I feel as if I had been ill—ill a long time. How long, Clive?"

"Only one night," I answered briefly.

He drew a deep breath. "Ah, one night lost! . . . Clive, we must start immediately."

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So convinced was I that all attempts at dissuasion would be worse than useless, that in spite of all the difficulties in the way my only answer was a silent assent.

As I left my friend's bedside, my glance fell on our little companion, who, almost forgotten and quite neglected during the past twelve hours, had curled himself to sleep close to Roy, and was just then opening his eyes at the sound of our voices.

"What shall we do with him?" I asked.

Roy's strained look softened as he glanced at the white, silky-coated little creature that nestled so confidingly by his side.

"He will have to make his choice between new friends and old," was Roy's reply, as he gently stroked the animal's head. "He must by now be sufficiently recovered to walk without help, and so we shall leave him free either to follow us or to go back to his companions."

As he spoke Roy rose unsteadily and crossed the narrow space that served us as a bedroom.

"Can we start at once, Clive?"

I saw his haste would not admit of a moment's delay.

"I am ready. What shall we take with us?"

"Nothing—save a few tools to construct the raft. We shall find wood on the mountain, and vegetal fibres to bind the logs together. . . . A few boxes of biscuits we must have, and a rug, should the nights be cold. Nothing else."

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"And what about your telescope,—your dynamo?" I exclaimed suddenly.

Roy gave a start, and for half a minute or more stared at me in absolute silence, a look almost of terror in his eyes; then he slowly passed his hand across his forehead.

"Oh, the telescope—the dynamo—I had forgotten them."

I turned away, not trusting myself to meet his glance just then. Meanwhile, my brain was busy with a hundred schemes, all impracticable.

"Roy," I said at last, "I don't think anything can be done, except to build a rough cart—merely a few logs on four massive wheels—and so convey the machines as far as the river. Of course we shall have to draw the cart ourselves: It will be hard work, very hard, but not impossible. And if it must be done——"

"Yes, it must be done," said Roy. "Shall we begin now, Clive?"

Seeing his white face and shaking limbs, and knowing better than he did through what crisis he had just passed, I implored him to rest a little longer, and let me go alone to the forest; but his only answer was: "Let me be, Clive, if you love me! It is better to work than to think."

That same evening we visited, once more together, but as spoilers this time, the magnificent forest of flowers. With hardly a thought of regret

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for the beauties we devastated, we ruthlessly set our axes into the jewelled stems, hacked and sawed and bored the wood that shone like gold in the sun, tore the fanciful garlands thrown from tree to tree, weaving them into stout cords to bind the logs together. Ere the first moon had risen, our work was almost done.

When completed, our cart bore a curious resemblance to some festal chariot of the Merovingian kings, as it stood before us in all its barbaric magnificence, heavy in form, and brilliant as with the glitter of gold and precious stones. Yet, in spite of all its massiveness, I could not help a fear that it might give way on the road, like an overtaxed beast of burden, under the twofold weight of the telescope and the dynamo. But, happily, the telescope was not a large one, and both the dynamo and the electric accumulator were machines of a specially light build ; then, also, I hoped that the peculiar buoyancy of the planet's atmosphere would help to lighten a burden which, on Earth, would have been well-nigh intolerable.

At noon on the following day we were ready to start. The *Estrella*, alas, we were obliged to leave behind us, *à la garde de Dieu.*

When everything stood in readiness for our departure, we allowed ourselves a few moments' rest from our labours, to gain strength for the labour to come. I stretched myself full length on the ground outside the *Estrella*, but Roy was

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too deep in thought to indulge even in an attitude of repose.

"You see, Clive," he said, when he perceived that in spite of my closed eyes I was fully awake, "you understand that this is a forlorn hope? This is why I wished to go alone. Until now I knew where I was going: I saw the goal, clearly, even though it stood at the confines of the Universe. Now—I have lost hope. . . . I am going out into the dark. . . . And you are coming with me, Clive!"

I steadied my voice and answered in a light tone:

"You know I would follow you everywhere, Roy, in darkness or in light! Be of good cheer! Perhaps all is not lost!"

After a long silence he said, as if only just answering my words: "No, perhaps not—perhaps there is a hope—only—I no longer feel it—see it. . . . But I am not myself just now, Clive! You must have hope, and will, and wisdom for us both!"

After a time he drew a notebook from his breast-pocket and rapidly turned its leaves.

"You never studied the quite modern science of exegesis, did you, Clive?"

"Never."

"It is wonderfully interesting! Not at all the dry and dismal study one would imagine. The works of Sabatier, for instance—you never heard of him?—one of the cleverest independent

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thinkers that France possesses, and that is saying a great deal, for France is far ahead of us intellectually. You must read his study of Jesus of Nazareth, if ever we return to Earth! But I was saying——"

He turned another two or three pages.

"Ah, here it is! Sabatier also accepts this date, 781 of the Roman year, as the most probable date of the death of our Lord—747 being generally accepted as the date of His birth. Everything points to it: sacred and profane history, Jewish as well as Christian tradition. By the way, is it not curious that the astronomer Kepler should have discovered—or at least imagine he had discovered—the star which heralded the birth of the Child? According to ancient rabbinical traditions, the destinies of Israel were inseparably connected with some heavenly sign—and this sign was the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces. Knowing this, Kepler set to work, and found that this conjunction of planets happened in this same year 747 of Rome!"

"Really!" I exclaimed; "why, this is very wonderful, Roy!"

"It *is* wonderful, for both the first and the third Gospels, each one embodying, as modern criticism has proved, two ancient and absolutely separate traditions, agree in placing the birth of Christ in the last years of Herod's reign, and even

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Talmudical documents agree on this point with the Gospels. Indeed, this date of the birth of our Lord—747—confronts us at every turn, whether in Jewish, or Roman, or Christian history, thus making of the year 781 of the Roman calendar the almost certain date of His martyrdom and death.

"It is this date I have accepted. It is on this date I have built all my work. Unless, somewhere, a mistake has been made, we are too late. The spring of the year 781 of Rome is at this moment beginning on Earth—the Earth of past ages, as we see it from this planet. By the time we reach the southern hemisphere, the supreme tragedy of the world will have been enacted on the hill of Calvary. . . . Christ will be crucified, and laid in the tomb wherein no man had yet been laid, and on Easter morn He will arise and bid men rejoice because death is slain, and eternal life made manifest. . . . We might have seen this, Clive! We might——"

He locked his hands in an agony of silent despair.

The stillness of the morning was unbroken, save by the silvery voice of the brook that made its way, singing, to some unknown sea. Roy slowly rose and laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Whether there is hope or not, God alone knows. But we must work, Clive, to the last. . . . Are you ready?"

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I silently assented, and the next hour saw us well on our way to the yet undiscovered South.

Shall I describe our short but terrible journey to the great river, when we toiled, day and night, under a burden never meant for human shoulders to bear—the incredible hardships endured in the last days, when, become beasts of burden in very truth, we dragged an almost intolerable weight up the steeps of those mountains which stood like so many impregnable fortresses between ourselves and our goal? . . . Shall I describe our long but comparatively easy journey by water, when, the river discovered at last after many a fruitless search, we hastily constructed a raft, and trusted ourselves to the swift current that was to bear us to the Land of Promise? . . . Shall I describe the marvellous scenes we passed on the way, when, too tired even to wonder at their weird beauty, we traversed gorges of ruby-coloured, semi-transparent rocks, through which the sun shone as through a veil of glory—valleys where fairy-trees dropped living gems over the smiling earth—golden meadows whereon strangely-shaped creatures disported themselves by moonlight, and slept in wondrous nests when the sun was high in the heavens—wonders of colour, and shape, and sound—wonders of animal life, and plant life, and the inanimate life of the silent rock, the sparkling stream, the stately cloud! Everything was wonder and miracle to us two children of Earth. And yet we passed,

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sometimes unheeding, often indifferent, through scenes of perfect beauty and scenes of intense horror. In the mountains, ere the river was discovered, we traversed grim, barren valleys of eternal silence, where rocks, huge as Pyrenean peak and dark as night, towered to the skies, giant sentinels of Solitude; and though our feet dropped blood at every step, we passed on, and spared not a word in murmur or in wonderment. . . .

Later on, when the river bore us past enchanted forests,

> "From stately nave to nave, from vault to vault,
> Through bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light . . ."

not a sound of admiration broke from our lips, as we glided past wonders which no pen can describe. On, on we went, through flower-strewn vales and deserted plains—silent, stern pilgrims who had wandered so far from Earth that light itself must take centuries to cross the chasm which separated us from our native planet—yet even there—even then—slowly journeying towards the Cross.

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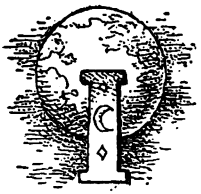
CHAPTER VII

"THE EARTH!"



I HAVE not described our journey from the northern to the southern hemisphere — indeed, volumes might be filled with the mere classification of all the strange forms of animal and plant life we daily discovered;* neither will I relate the various small adventures which befell us ere we arrived at the twenty-fifth degree of latitude; nor dwell on the incidents that marked our landing, one dark, tempestuous night, on the western bank of the great river.

Within three months from the date of our starting, we found ourselves stranded on an immense plain—I had almost said a desert—of burning, blood-red sand, whose vast monotony was but partly relieved by curious mounds, mole-hills on a giant's scale, scattered here and there,

* I hope soon to publish Roy's voluminous notes on the climatology, physical geography, and, most interesting of all, the fauna and flora of Kallistos.

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and crowned with a pale golden, fantastically shaped vegetation. Above us bent the dazzling white sky like a semi-sphere of crystal ; beyond us stretched the desert—the unknown. No sign of life, save where an oasis flung its note of vivid yellow in the red immensity — no snow-topped mountains rising in the dim distance—no brook tripping down the hills through banks of golden moss—no invisible winged choristers to gladden the night with song : only the river flowing by, swift and silent—all forms of animate life hidden away as if in fear of the light, and an oppressive heat resting like some palpable burden over the crimson plains.

With a sense of infinite loneliness I remembered the beautiful valley, deserted almost as soon as discovered, and silently wondered how we should manage to exist for any length of time in what I mentally called the Sahara of Kallistos.

Roy was indifferent to everything save the care of his machines. Cast adrift on a rock in mid-ocean, he would still have adjusted his telescope and scanned the heavens—then contentedly lain down to starve, his work accomplished. Since the shock that had almost unhinged his mind, the practical cares of the expedition had devolved entirely upon me ; but in the present emergency I needed neither prudence nor resolution to decide upon our course of action, since the choice was merely between the oasis—and the desert.

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The night of our landing had been a wild one, and for the first time since our arrival on Kallistos we had known darkness, darkness as dense as a moonless midnight on Earth. The white, the golden, and the azure moons had been alike eclipsed by heavy clouds, chasing one another across the sky with the frantic haste of witches when the Brocken is aglow.

Our landing was perilous in the extreme, and once it was safely accomplished we could do nothing but wait in darkness for the dawn ; but with the coming of the sun the storm subsided and the white orb rose in a pure white sky.

The nearest oasis was only at a distance of about a mile, but it took us over an hour to reach it, walking as we did with utmost difficulty in the loose dry sand, and blinded by its crimson glare.

We had seen so many strange sights since we had left our native Earth—our eyes had rested on so many wonderful shapes of animal and plant life—that we felt almost beyond the possibility of surprise. The unreal had become the real, and wonders were our daily bread. Yet both Roy and myself were lost in amazement when, on reaching the oasis, we beheld the extraordinary plant-shapes that composed its forests. Beautiful and—to our earthly eyes—fantastic as were the flower-trees of the northern hemisphere, they had not prepared us for the wonderful vegetation of the oasis. Here, as in the valley wherein we had landed—as every-

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where in Kallistos,—the foliage was yellow, rising from the deep, warm gold of the tree stems to the delicate citron tints of the young shoots. But the shape of the trees was different from anything we had yet seen on the planet. Imagine a forest of gigantic mushrooms—their stems a pillar of gold, broad at the base, slender at the top—their cones a closely-woven texture of pale primrose leaves so joined and shaped as to form a perfectly smooth surface that resembled the gilt roof of a cupola shining in the sun ; beneath this, hanging in thick, odorous clusters, a wealth of large velvety blossoms varying in tint from the darkest purple to the palest violet and rose colours. . . .

Our world has long since learnt the lesson that life, whether animal or plant life, ever seeks to adapt itself to its environment. In its every stem and branch, in every detail of its structure, the flora of Kallistos proclaimed the universality of this law. In the temperate zone we had seen the flower-world rise in gladness to meet the sun, and blossoms fluttering like gorgeous flags on the topmost branches of trees. Here, at the confines of the tropical regions, Nature had been more prudent. She had protected her seedlings from the scorching noon-rays by roofs of massive foliage, and bidden her flowers blossom downwards in the shade, hanging from the leafy domes like grapes from a golden trellis. The device was successful. So serried were the ranks of trees, so

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closely interwoven their leaves, that not one ray of sunshine fell athwart the forest to disturb its soft, cool twilight.

With a sigh of pleasure we breathed the warm, moist air that seemed almost cold after the breath of the desert; for though the sun was but newly risen, already the heat was intense over the plains, and the blood-red sand throbbed as with latent fire.

The dainty moss with the dew-like blossoms which carpeted the woods and valleys of the northern hemisphere, was nowhere visible in the oasis; but a bright yellow creeping plant covered the soil with its starry flowers, white-petalled and crimson-hearted.

We both felt like Vandals at the first steps we took over this beautiful flower-world, crushing underfoot the delicate, fragrant petals; then, as we walked farther and farther into the woods, and the blossoming continued, flower pressed against flower in an exuberance of life, we seemed to be two conquerors of old passing knee-deep in lilies and roses on the triumphal road. . . .

Even in the heart of the forest the silence was unbroken by song of bird, flutter of wing, or light passing step of some frightened creature of the woods. But we knew that day, not night, was the time of repose on the planet, and so waited for the rising of the first moon to know what living

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things of earth or air were to be our companions in the oasis.

For the oasis—the little forest on a hillock, desert-girt—was to be our home for months—perhaps for ever—if the *Estrella*—— But in that fear lurked madness ; and instead of uttering my thoughts aloud, I merely commented on our good luck in having landed so near to this little nest of coolness, twilight and fragrance, amid the sun-scorched plains.

"Yes," said Roy, "this will be our home. We can live here—and work there."

His glance indicated the way we had come to the oasis.

"You mean——?"

"That a telescope would be useless beneath this roof of foliage."

"True. I had not thought of it. Then it were wiser if we went no farther, but stayed close to the edge of the wood. We could build a hut there with the fragments of our raft—if a hut be necessary in this tropical climate! But, Roy, we must find water somewhere, or else how shall we live?"

"The river?" suggested Roy.

"But the distance to the river is a good mile's walk, through hot, shifting sand. . . . If it must be—well, it must, but it will greatly complicate our daily life. . . . The smallest rivulet, moisture of any sort, would be a blessing."

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"There must be moisture where there are plants."

"Yes, but it looks as if these trees, like the palms of our deserts, had, to quote the Arabs, 'their feet in water, their heads in fire.' Their roots probably extend many feet underground, and no moisture reaches the surface. If we could find some fruit——"

But of fruit, as we understand the word on Earth, there seemed none in the oasis, and not the faintest ripple of a stream broke the intense stillness of the woods. Happily, our rations were not at an end ; we had eaten so little during our journey in space, that several large boxes of biscuits and compressed food were still untouched when we landed ; we had taken them with us on our raft, and would be able to live on their contents for another few weeks—if we practised the strictest economy. During our long migration from North to South we had subsisted mostly on a diet of biscuits varied by fruit, for the precious "finger-plant" grew on either side of the river for many a mile of our southward course. When we seemed likely to be deprived of this delicacy, I attempted to dry the plant in the sun, and so make use of it when the fresh fruit should fail us ; to my pleasant surprise, my efforts met with complete success, and almost to the day of our landing we were able to vary our more than frugal meals with the delicious, piquant flavour of the sun-baked fruit.

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Once or twice, in spite of Roy's protest, I had brought down a bird, one of those strange, swan-like creatures, purely white, as were all animals on Kallistos, and had remorselessly skinned it—for its silky covering was more like fur than feathers—and dressed it for food. But although I tried several species of birds, and also various small quadrupeds, I never came across anything edible even in the widest acceptance of the word. It might have been our cooking that was at fault, but we found the flesh of all these creatures almost leather-like in texture, and possessing moreover a pungent flavour that would have made even the tenderest meat unpleasant to the taste.

Had our little companion of the valley been with us, he would probably have been our guide in this as in many other matters; but we had left him far behind on the way—and more than once had we regretted him.

He had at first trudged manfully by our side, glancing uneasily from time to time at our gilded chariot with its burden of unknown and fearsome objects; but at the end of the second day of march he seemed so tired that the next morning Roy lifted him on to the cart, and sat him down between the telescope and the dynamo. Alas, these machines were evidently fraught with terrific menaces for the little creature, for he immediately jumped down with every sign of fear and loathing, and it was some time before he made up his mind to

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accompany us any farther. At the close of the third day he sat on a bank by the way, and looked alternately at Roy and at the track we had come by. There was a strange wistfulness in his dark eyes, as if he were mentally debating the question: Which shall it be—advance or retreat? Follow these men who have saved my life, even if I die of fatigue on the road—or say farewell to them for ever and return to my tribe?

On the fourth day he followed us for some little time, then sat down on the wayside in an attitude pitifully like that of a tired child.

"Come," said Roy gently, as he attempted to lift him up, "you must return to your companions! The steeps of the mountain are too rough for your feet. You must go back to the soft grass and the flowers of the valley."

The creature looked at him attentively, as he always did when Roy spoke to him; and as Roy's fingers were pointing in the direction of the valley, he seemed to understand. He moved his head vigorously once or twice. "Yes, I will go," was expressed almost as plainly as if by spoken words; and with many a backward glance our little friend slowly retraced his steps.

We missed him greatly during the following days, and during the long, monotonous weeks on the river. We missed him now, when we were once more stranded in an unknown region of an unknown world. In the tangled forest paths he

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would have been our guide, a guide whose instinct would have led, where our reasoning halted. With the unerring intuition we so sadly lacked, he would have gathered one among the many blossoms that drooped like living gems from every tree, and offered it to us as the best substitute for the delicious "finger-plant" of his native valley; he would have found, hidden somewhere, above or below earth, a berry, or leaf, or root, which would have been to us as manna in the wilderness. Without him the problem of our daily bread—that eternal problem of the human race, was destined to remain unsolved during the many days we spent in the oasis.

We suffered hunger, we suffered thirst. Thirst parched our mouths and cracked our lips when we were too weary to wander across the throbbing plains in quest of water. Hunger gnawed at our vitals even while we gazed at the stars. For this is the sign of man on earth, the mark of his serfdom and bondage—that though the music of the spheres may be chanting in his head, and the scroll of the starry heavens be unfolded before his eyes, yet hunger will not delay because of the hour of ecstasy, and man must eat of the fruits of the earth and drink of its waters ere the glory of the vision has faded from his brow.

. . . . . .

Many hours before the golden and the azure moons had risen, almost simultaneously, above the

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purple plains, Roy was at his post on the edge of the oasis, with the dynamo and the accumulator, in perfect working order, fixed as firmly as was possible in the loose sand, and the telescope pointing to that region of infinite space where our solar system revolved invisibly.

Invisibly! So far had we wandered from Earth, that our sun was not even as one little star among a multitude of stars, but was absolutely, eternally invisible to the unaided human eye! I caught my breath as I watched Roy adjust the lenses. Only thus, at times, did I suddenly realise the awful distances we had traversed, the ever dark, ever silent chasm that yawned between myself and all that I held dear. . . .

We had not seemed so far from Earth in the northern hemisphere, for the *Estrella* was there, and I well remembered how, on returning from our first expedition to the forest of flowers, its mere outline in the distance had seemed freighted with happy promises, and called a welcome as we came. And now—everything depended on the next moment! If the Earth were visible, as Roy believed, and we had not, after all, arrived too late—if that "one chance in a thousand" had come to pass,—then all was well. The perils, the privations, the loneliness, the travail of body and soul, would be forgotten. If not—— I knew what it meant, although I tried to kill the thought. It would spell madness for Roy, and for myself—

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madness also, perhaps! Alone, alone in an unknown world!

My dread grew with every second that passed, until I feared to look at Roy. I felt, rather than saw, that he was white and rigid, but calm in every movement.

Slowly the wonderful radiance of the two coloured moons filled the sky where lately the sun had reigned in silvery splendour. The night had come, the night that was more glorious than day. . . . The last preparations were completed. . . . God, the length of every second!

With steady hand Roy pressed the knob which connected the dynamo with the telescope. . . . Another second. . . . Another eternity. . . . And then those words spoken low in the great silence of the plains: "*The Earth!*"

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CHAPTER VIII

PALESTINE

THE Earth! Most welcome words that tongue of man could speak! The Earth where we were born, where our loved ones lived, and at this very moment perhaps gazed at the stars, wreathing a prayer around our names. . . . The Earth! In the sudden joy of these two words I forgot all else, save that a thought from the far-away world had crossed the infinite spaces, and was in our midst, making us glad. I forgot that the real object of our journey was as yet unachieved, the goal as distant and seemingly as unattainable as ever. But Roy remembered, and his joy was brief.

The Earth! I trembled like a leaf in the wind as I took my place at the telescope.

I may have already mentioned that Roy's instrument was so constructed that with the aid of a powerful reflector two observers of the heavens could use it simultaneously; it had also a clever arrangement of blue lenses, so disposed as to form

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a kind of *camera obscura*, which allowed a study of the sky in the most brilliant light as well as during the hours of darkness. This was a necessary precaution on a planet where night, as we know it on Earth, did not exist, and midnight was often as resplendent as noonday. But it was more than this: it was an indispensable condition of Roy's success, since, had an observation of the sky been possible in darkness only, it might have happened, by some fatal mischance, that night on Kallistos, in the southern hemisphere, should have coincided with night-time on Earth over the Mediterranean shores, thus making even one glimpse of the Holy Land an utter impossibility.

The Earth! How can I describe my sensations when, across the immeasurable abysms of space, I beheld the little bluish-green planet half hidden in the radiance of its sun?

"And is this the Earth?" I murmured as in a dream.

Without answering me, Roy turned the electric current to a greater intensity, and immediately the planet leapt forth, seemingly nearer to us by some millions of miles—an enormous globe filling the entire field of view, no longer half submerged in a flood of sunrays, but itself a glowing sphere, brilliant with a soft light of subdued green and blue. The Sun was on the right side of the Earth and a little below it, the Earth having but lately passed out of the spring equinox—or, to

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define our relative positions more clearly, if we imagine a triangle in space with the Polar Star at its summit, the Earth and Kallistos would have formed the two angles of its base.

The North Pole, lately emerged from its long night, was resplendent in snowy whiteness, and not a cloud above it dulled the brilliance of its icebergs and snow-plains. The western hemisphere was turned towards us, and the immense sombre green surface of the Pacific Ocean was only broken, near the Polar circle, by the jagged outlines of North America and Eastern Siberia.

We passed the night at the telescope, watching the movement of the Earth, and the light creeping, almost imperceptibly, towards the Asiatic continent, rising over Japan, sending its first glittering shafts over the sacred mountain of Fuji, then little by little enveloping the vast stretches of land until the greater part of Asia, from Nova Zembla to Borneo, was bathed in the splendour of day.

Roy released another spring, and the Earth-globe vanished, leaving in its place a vast stretch of land, seemingly but half a mile distant. The sun was rising over the palaces and rose-gardens of Persia, lighting with sudden flame the shores of the Caspian Sea, flaring over the deserts of Arabia, then casting its first golden rays over the mountains of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem! Jerusalem! The welcome cry of the old crusaders re-echoed in the plains of Kallistos.

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Jerusalem, the most beloved of all the cities of Earth, Land of Promise to the old and to the modern world, Holy City alike of Christian and of Jew! The first arrows of the rising sun touched with roseate fire the white palaces of Mount Zion, set a crown of glory on the Tower of David, fell in a shower of radiance over the vast ascending magnificence of the Temple on Mount Moriah, flashed along the royal colonnade of Herod the Great to the castle of Antonia, descended over the white-roofed houses of the city of David, quickened to new life the slumbering Pool of Bethesda, illumined hill and valley, city and garden, awakening the king in his palace and the leper in his tomb.

And the light spread, the illumination continued, all Palestine basked in the morning sun, Judæa—Samaria—Galilee—the beautiful valley of Hebron, the desert of Bersabee where fled Hagar with the infant Ishmael, the plain of Saron, garden of Palestine, Jericho and its royal palms, Bethlehem Ephrata, nested among the hills, green Thabor, the Mount of Coming Light, and Carmel, crimsoned with laurel blooms and lilies, the red lilies of Palestine that are clothed more royally than Solomon—Nazareth climbing the mountain-side, and, like a cup set in the hills, the lake of Gennesareth, girt with all its little towns, and watched over eternally by the Mount of Beatitudes:—the Holy Land lay at our feet, bathed in the dewy brightness of an early spring day.

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And once more Roy increased the electric current, so that in its turn Palestine vanished and Jerusalem alone was visible—so close that it seemed we must hear the murmur of its awakening life, breathe the fragrance of its myrtle-grown hills — so close that it seemed as if, on some hill that was not Zion, nor Moriah, nor Olivet, we stood at rising sun and gazed into the valley.

Life stirred on the housetops and in the streets. Already the gates of the city were open, and people passed in and out with the hurry belonging to early hours in the East. In the courts and terraces on Mount Zion, in the house of Caiaphas and the palace of Herod, slaves were seen darting hither and thither, as busy as bees on a summer morning; on Mount Moriah priests and people thronged the cloisters of the temple; at the castle of Antonia a troop of men in the garb of Roman soldiers emerged from the Old Tower gate, their helmets and breastplates a glittering target for sun-rays. . . . But it was on the market-place that the activity was at its height. There the Syrian dancers from the king's palace elbowed the soldiers at the gate, and sailors from the Red Sea jostled the high-turbaned Rabbis or the solemn Pharisees, Arabian or Tyrian merchants, sellers of musk, frankincense, and all the rare spices of the East, pressed close to Hebrew pedlars bent double under bales of multi-coloured carpets, trays of jewellery,

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and women's veils that fluttered like banners in the breeze.

I had seen bazars in India and markets in Tunis, and in spite of the nineteen hundred years that had elapsed since that laughing, gossiping, bargaining crowd collected in Jerusalem, yet "the unchangeable East" once more proclaimed itself unchangeable, and nothing but a slight diversity of costumes betrayed the centuries that had passed. Against a background unsoftened by the haze that lingers so lovingly over a northern landscape, was the same violent contrast of colours I had so often noticed in my *Wanderjahr* on the Mediterranean—the same crude yellow, blue, and green, the same vivid crimson and flaming scarlet which, through some unknown magic of sun or sky, yet formed an harmonious ensemble; the same scenes of barbaric magnificence and pitiful poverty, and the same picturesqueness in this poverty—the half-naked, sunburnt, bright-eyed children playing in a patch of sunlight, or pelting one another with fruit; the passing litter of some great lord or lady robed in cloth of gold; the same immovable women, veiled and silent, sitting patiently beside their baskets of dates or figs, or their jars of honey-of-wine from En-Gedi;—all, all was there, save the noise, the sound of men's shrill voices crying their wares, the plaintive bleating of sheep and goats, the trampling of hoofs, the clink of money on the counters—the hundred and one

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cries of a multitude of men and beasts. Here all was hushed: the very children played in silence in the sunshine. This it was that gave a strange, an almost uncanny shadowiness to the scene: we looked down on a city throbbing with life, and the silence of the desert was about us.

I turned my eyes away from the crowded city at our feet and looked at Roy, opening my lips to ask a question, when I saw his right hand suddenly tighten over the instrument.

"Clive," he said without turning round—and I knew his voice was calm only through the excess of his emotion,—"Clive, did you see Mount Olivet?"

I returned to the telescope.

"Yes; it is that farther hill, is it not, dark with olive trees and myrtles, and—— Ah, what are those white spots, like tents, dotted all over the mount?"

Still very quietly Roy answered: "They *are* tents, the tents of the pilgrims of the Passover."

"The Passover! Oh, Roy, are we in time, then, after all? In time? And are these the Easter-days of Christ?"

Roy lifted his large eyes to mine, and I read hope in their depths.

"It may be—it may not. We must wait. If it is the holy Easter time, we shall know, soon. We shall see Him! We shall see the entry into

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Jerusalem—the trial—the crucifixion—and death—and the glory that came after."

With a few short intervals of rest, we passed all night and the first hours of day at the telescope, and looked — looked until our heads throbbed with pain and a fever-haze blurred all the view—looked at Jerusalem rising to a new life after the sleep of night — Jerusalem hushed and peaceful in the burning glare of mid-day — Jerusalem awaking when the sunset hours lengthened the shadows of the hills, and evening breezes wafted over the city the fragrance of oleanders and citron trees and the white hyacinths of the valley. . . . We saw priests and doctors of the Law, Pharisees and Sadducees walking gravely in the streets or standing in groups on the terraces or in the courts of the temple ; we saw the labourer go forth into his vineyard and the merchant returning to his home ; and at sunset we watched the white roofs of the city people themselves with a multitude of men, women, and children, Jew and Gentile, princes of Israel and Roman patricians, Greek dancing girls and Hebrew maidens, each one awaiting the coolness of night and its peace.

But the Man of Nazareth we saw not ; and the Earth slowly went one step farther in her eternal course, hiding the Holy Land from our view in the darkness beyond the sun. . . . And not a sign was given us whereby we might know if mankind's

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supreme tragedy had yet been enacted in its midst; if the tree of the Cross had been raised aloft on Calvary; or if Jerusalem, Jerusalem that killed the prophets and stoned them that were sent unto her, had not yet given over to torture and slow death He who came to say that God is Love.

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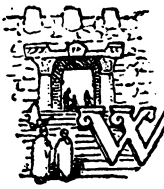
CHAPTER IX

ON THE STEPS OF THE TEMPLE



WITH the falling of night over the Holy Land, Roy's little flame of hope died out. Conscious at last of an immense lassitude, he flung himself down on the hot sand and for hours lay quite still, with eyes closed and lips moving as with the murmur of dreams. But I knew him to be awake, and despairing. I was myself weary unto death, but sleep was impossible. I sat down by his side and listened to the first sounds of returning day—the invisible winged choir that psalmodied its matins beneath the forest arches.

As I sat there a strange peace came over me—the peace of the dawn, or of night—the peace that comes with the moon and the rustle of foliage and all those visions best seen in darkest hours. I was on Earth once more, and Estrella's hand clasped mine. It was night,—night as we know it on our sombre planet, a night illumined by a solitary moon poised high above our heads.

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On the Steps of the Temple

We stood together in a garden of the East, a garden wherein crimson lilies and white cyclamen blossomed against the dark background of myrtles and olive trees. . . . We were alone, yet not alone, for a Presence stood with us in the garden, as of a man, white-robed and dimly seen in the darkening path. . . . And we knew that from this Presence came peace—a peace more intense than the stillness of night, more gentle than the whispering of forests at dawn, holier than mother's love and sweeter than lisping of babes. . . . I closed my eyes in a delicious dream, and when I opened them once more, lo! the Presence was still by my side, not visibly as in the Eastern garden beneath the olive trees, but felt, felt as we feel the sunshine on our faces, or the kisses of the Belovëd. . . . My weariness was past, and a sense of coming wonders made me glad.

. . . . . .

I burned with impatience for the coming of night. Shortly after our sunset, dawn would break on Earth over the Mediterranean shores, and for nearly twelve hours* the Holy Land would lie at our feet, spreading out its hills and its valleys, its rivers, lakes, cities and gardens to the magic illumination of Eastern sunshine. Once

* The day on Earth, as seen from Kallistos, was a little less than twelve hours in length, owing to atmospheric refraction, which blurred the outlines at sunrise and sunset, and thus made observation extremely difficult.

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more we would see the sun rising over Zion, once more we would scan the streets of the holy city, Jerusalem, and all the little white towns by the lakeside—Magdala, Gennesareth, Bethsaida—for one glimpse of the Prophet of Galilee as "he passed, doing good," on the road that led to Calvary.

Never had the day seemed so long, never had the sun-star burnt so implacably white in a cloudless heaven. . . . I aroused Roy from the semi-torpor into which he had fallen, and together we crept under the shelter of the trees.

Yet, in spite of the intense heat and the blinding glare of the plain, blood-red beneath a white-hot sky, many a time during the day did I venture out of the forest, and, adjusting the telescope (I now understood its mechanism, marvellous in its perfect simplicity), I gazed at the sight so familiar, yet so unfamiliar to human eyes—the Earth of the past—the Earth of over nineteen hundred years ago.

I saw the busy life of East and West centring on the Mediterranean shores—Athens the Beautiful, with her sublime Parthenon, and that greater glory, the Academy where Plato taught the soul's immortality—Alexandria, the teacher of nations, keeping watch over the sea—Antioch, the city of palaces and marble colonnades—Palmyra the Proud, enthroned in the desert like a solitary queen—Tyre the Magnificent, girded with temples as with a citadel. . . . I saw the first touch of the

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dawn awaken the Grecian Isles—Delos the Fair, still asleep under her glittering veil of dew—Salamine the Immortal—Samos, consecrated to the mother of all the gods—Cythera, the garden of Venus—Patmos, as yet unsanctified by the footsteps of John, the loving disciple and seer of wondrous visions. . . . I saw the sun-bathed deserts of Arabia, lately traversed by the wise men of the East who had come to worship the new-born Child. . . . Caravans of pilgrims, or merchants of ivory and gold and rare Indian spices, now crossed it in long, tortuous lines ; and as I looked I seemed almost to feel the great heat-throbs of the burning plains, almost to hear the tinkling of the camel-bells in the great silence of the desert. . . . I saw the wonderful old Roman world spreading from the city of seven hills on the Tiber, to the extremities of the world :—Imperial Rome guarded, like Jerusalem, by Nature's lofty fortresses, the eternal hills : double-crested Capitoline with the great temple of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva ; Mount Palatine crowned with the marble palaces of the patricians ; the Alban mounts, the Sabine hills, the towering Apennines. . . . I saw, between the Palatine and the Capitol, the famous *Forum Romanum*, centre of the ancient world, with the Senate-house, the shrine of Vesta, the temple of Castor and Pollux ; farther away, the open space of the *Circus Maximus*, and, by the banks of the Tiber, the Plain of Mars, where, at this very

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moment—it being the seventh hour of the day in Rome—the young nobles were engaged in various sports, some leaping or wrestling, others throwing the discus or the ball. . . . I saw the Bay of Neapolis, radiantly beautiful then as now, as it nestled between the double azure of sea and sky. To the south-west lay Micenum with a host of Roman galleys within its port, some going out, some coming in with sails spread to the breeze like the great wings of sea-birds ; while, trustfully resting at the foot of Vesuvius, Herculaneum and Pompeii smiled in the sunshine, awaiting their fate.

With eager eyes I searched the northern hemisphere for a glimpse of the sea-guarded isles that were one day to be called Britain, and to help rule the world. But though later on I saw its white cliffs and forest-covered plains, and the wild, free people that lived and fought in that far-away past, yet on that day all the British Isles and the north-west part of Gaul were under a mass of trailing clouds which, lit from above by the sun, looked like a vast continent of moving snow.

I saw the sun rise and set over the Atlantic Ocean, the abysm of water which as yet no sail had crossed. . . . I saw light dawn over the wonderful civilisation of the Incas and the tribes of semi-savages inhabiting Northern America. . . . And once more the Pacific Ocean turned its unrevealed depths towards the sun ; once more Asia appeared in the light : China, with her vast empire ; my

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native India, unconquered yet and untamed; Arabia; and then—Palestine!

Immediately I directed the electric current so that the holy city sprang into view, distant, as it seemed, but two hundred feet. As the first sun-ray flashed on the Tower of David, I involuntarily turned towards Roy, who had joined me on the edge of the oasis, and was sitting on a fallen tree with his face hidden in his hands. So weary did he look, so utterly spent, that I did not call him, but turned once more to the telescope.

The sun had risen over Jerusalem. On Mount Olivet the pilgrims' tents still dotted with white spots the dark green slopes of the mountain, and in the calm morning air the smoke of their fires rose in thin, transparent columns, like incense in the Temple not made with hands.

From Mount Olivet my glance wandered back to Mount Moriah and the Temple of whose royal magnificence not a stone would soon be left unturned to tell of the glory that was past. In spirit I roamed within its hallowed precincts, entered the gates of cedar-wood and gold, passed under the porch of Solomon, ascending from terrace to terrace, from court to court—from the court of the Gentiles to that of the Israelites, from the court of the women to that of the priests—until I stood within the Holy of Holies, where no man might enter save the high-priest alone, and wherein Jehovah dwelt,—solitary.

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As I looked thus, dreaming, my eyes were drawn to a group of rabbis standing together, apparently in deep converse, on the steps that led to the court of the priests. Once more I augmented the electric current, so that the Temple seemed but a hundred feet distant, and with eager glance I searched the group of holy men. They wore the garments of the Pharisaical sect, with deeply-fringed robes and flowing mantles, and the broad philacteries attached to the forehead and left arm. . . . Somewhat apart from them, on the last step of all, stood a white-clad, solitary figure—a man slender and tall, with dark flowing hair and eyes uplifted to the blue overhead. . . . A tremor ran through me, followed by an undefinable sense of peace and serenity, a joy too great for words.

Without moving I called out : " Roy ! "

There must have been an appeal in my voice, for immediately he rose and came to my side. He looked—one moment—two—three. . . . How silent he was ! Then suddenly, with a great cry of gladness, he knelt in worship and in prayer.

" God, 'tis He ! "

Our joy was as that of the bride when the bridegroom cometh. We had no hesitation and no doubt. In one glance we knew Him to be the One we sought, the One we had come from the extremities of the world to see, crossing the deserts of space to bring our gifts of worship, like the Magi of old.

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Had we not been alone, Roy and I, had anyone in a less highly-wrought mood been present, who had wondered whence we derived our assurance, we would have been powerless to answer him. This figure that stood on the steps of the temple, white against the white background of its terraces, was of a man—solitary—silent. Yet the sweet, ineffable dignity of his bearing proclaimed his kingship more triumphantly than a whole legion of angels and seraphim, and the look in his eyes as they rested over the farthest hills revealed the seer and saint more clearly than any golden nimbus woven of sun-rays and fire.

We knew Him for the Son of the Father, the Elder Brother of man, the Healer of the people, the Teacher of divine wisdom, the beloved Master of all who sin and repent and seek forgiveness in tears. . . . We saw Him—the Man most beloved of all the sons of men, the Prophet of Galilee for whose sake men and women and little children had gladly died in that wonderful past now born anew before our eyes—the Man in whose name wars had been waged, and empires overthrown—the Man in whose name also every deed of perfect charity had been accomplished in the last two thousand years. We saw Him, we saw Him not in a dream, with the eyes of love, not in a vision with the eyes of faith, but living and breathing before us—we saw Him as we saw the flowers at our feet, the trees above our heads. Time and

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Space were annihilated, and for one unforgetable moment, across the centuries that separated us, across the myriads of miles that divided us, we stood face to face with Him, gazing deep into His eyes—

"The great and tender eyes, sad with our sinning."

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CHAPTER X

THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM

A DAY passed — a night — another day, and yet another—and we saw not again the Nazarene; but our time of doubt and despair was over, and we waited patiently, as disciples do when the coming of the Master is assured.

In vain we searched the streets of the city, and the gardens outside the city, and all the little towns of Judæa where the Master was wont to dwell. Perhaps while our gaze was fixed on Jerusalem, He whom we sought was resting in Bethany, in the house of Martha and Mary; or while we scanned the white roads that led to Samaria and Galilee, was He sitting in the shadow of the temple, giving to his disciples the promise of His kingdom. . . .

We waited — but the time of waiting did not seem long.

For myself, I was mostly happy in Roy's

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happiness, in seeing the glad light that had returned to his eyes, the confident smile that played once more on his lips, almost as in the old days when, boys together, we walked home under the stars and dreamed the dream that had come true. His very youth seemed given back to him, in spite of grey hair and stooping shoulders ; his step was light again and brisk, as in the days of boyhood, and the old enthusiasm—that wonderful mixture of boyish fire and apostolic fervour—burnt in him with a pure, calm flame, as a lamp before an altar.

On the fifth night we were as usual at our post by the telescope. The white and the golden moons had but lately risen in our sky ; the azure moon was in its first quarter, but the white orb poised overhead threw a sheen as of crystallised snow over the crimson plains, transforming into so many silver domes the golden-roofed forests of the oasis.

On Earth the sun was newly risen above the mountains of Jerusalem. It was a perfect spring day in Palestine : flowers blossomed in every meadow—royal-robed lilies and white cyclamen, star-shaped narcissi and tulips in flaming crimson and gold. In every field the cactus hedges gleamed with dew, olive trees and sycamores and the royal oak of the valley spread out their new leaves to the sun, and the myrtle groves near the city were robed in white as for a coming bridal.

Not a cloud sailed in the transparent sky, and above the highest hills of Jerusalem blue doves

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circled slowly over the old tower of Antonia. It was the springtime of which Solomon sang—

"Lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone,
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of singing is come,
And the voice of the dove is heard in the land!"

There was a great movement in the city—not the daily going in and coming out, not the usual activity of soldier and merchant, priest and peasant —but a steady flow of people through the Golden Gate to the road that led to Bethany.

There were men and women and children. There were priests of the temple in flowing robes and gorgeous mantles walking almost side by side with African traders and Syrian slaves, while a prince of Jerusalem in glittering raiment rode behind a group of shepherds from Galilee. Many there were who bore olive branches and branches of palm—but these were the shepherds and the slaves—and little children who ran by their mother's side held armfuls of laurel blooms and lilies. . . . And those who bore the branches and the flowers seemed to be going forth to some great holiday, so eager were their steps, so joyful their demeanour; but the priests and elders of the synagogue walked slowly, almost reluctantly on the way, conversing gravely among themselves. In short, the people seemed going to a high festival, and its leaders to a debate.

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At last, as we searched eagerly the length of the white road, we saw coming in the distance, surrounded by a little group of disciples,—the Master.

Clad in a simple white tunic, with a white mantle covering His head and falling down to His sandalled feet, He advanced slowly in the sunshine.

When the crowd saw Him in the distance, the foremost ran out to meet Him, waving their branches aloft; and the flowers fell from the children's hands, strewing the road with petals, and the women detached their veils and made of them a pathway for the coming of the King.

"Hosanna, Son of David! Hosanna!"

Did not the cry of the multitude rise towards us from the past, through all the spaces of creation? Did we not hear the shouts of the men, the songs of the women, the piping voices of children?

"Hosanna, Son of David! Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

Ah, the day was a glad one! It was the day of sunshine before the coming of the storm.

It was a day of miracles also. By the roadside sat a man, bare-headed, unkempt, in rags. As the multitude passed, he rose and staggered forward with trembling hands outstretched. . . . And we saw he was blind.

Words long since learnt, and long forgotten,

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suddenly came back to me in all their epic simplicity :—

"A certain blind man sat by the wayside begging :

"And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.

"And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

"And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!

"And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace : but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!

"Jesus stood and commanded him to be brought unto him : and when he was come near, he asked him,

"Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

"And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight : thy faith hath saved thee.

"And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God : and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God."

. . . . . .

Was this the blind beggar spoken of by the evangelists as the son of Timæus, he to whom the Master gave back his sight at the gates of Jericho?

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Was it another, unmentioned in the book of Christ's miracles?

We seemed to feel the hush that came over the multitude when the old man staggered forward, and with sightless eyes peered into the Master's face. We seemed to hear the shrill cry of mingled hope and misery: Son of David, have mercy on me!

With a gesture in itself a benediction, the Nazarene passed His hands over the man's eyes, and we knew the words of power and pardon were spoken, although we heard them not, those words which the waiting Earth shall not hear again: "Be of good cheer: Thy sins be forgiven thee!"

Under the divine touch a tremor shook the old man's frame, and lo! as the Master's hands were removed from his eyes—*he saw*! We were witnesses of the miracle. . . . Gazing upwards, the man's eyes seemed to meet our own, as from the face of the Prophet of Galilee his enraptured glance rose to the limitless blue overhead. . . . We saw the heavenly light reflected in his eyes; we saw the quivering lips parted in a smile as joyous as a little child's; we saw the transformation and transfiguration of the man.

"And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God."

Walking at first with uncertain steps, as those do who have long dwelt in darkness, the man

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mingled with the crowd, and, walking in the steps of his saviour, was soon lost to our view in the multitude that followed the Nazarene.

. . . . . .

When the Master laid His hands on the eyes of the blind man, and the blind man "received his sight," a wave of mad joy surged over the crowd: women fell at His feet and kissed the hem of His robe, others brought their children to Him to be blessed, and He lifted them in His arms and kissed them tenderly, as a mother might do. . . . But there were others among the multitude who kept aloof—priests and doctors of the Law, those who came out to meet the Master without any offering of olive branches, and whose pious hands held no flowers to strew before His feet.

Priests and doctors of the temple! Guardians of the old and written law which ever opposes the unwritten and new-revealed law of liberty and love! Priests of the jealous God, man-made at man's image, who for so many ages have stood in the place of the Father whose love is deeper than the seas!

As we watched them whispering together, apart now from the crowd—separated in fact as in spirit,—the shadow of Calvary seemed to fall athwart the brightness of the day, veiling in impalpable gloom the flower-strewn road that led to Jerusalem through the Golden Gate. With a tightening of

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the heart we realised that amid the love and the loyalty of the people lurked hatred, treachery, and the spirit of the accursed priest who gave Judas thirty pieces of silver for the betrayal of the Son of Man.

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CHAPTER XI

THE ROAD TO CALVARY

AFTER the entry into Jerusalem, we saw the Master many times. We saw Him on the steps and in the courts of the temple, giving to His disciples the last message of peace and good-will, revealing to all who came to Him the mystery of the kingdom which no human eyes have seen or shall see—the invisible kingdom whose Lord is the All-Father, —whose throne is in the heart of man.

We saw Him in the narrow streets of the city's poorest quarters, entering fearlessly the dens of misery and vice, His gracious presence

> "Bringing sunshine to sad places
> Where the sunshine could not fall."

We saw Him at evening time on Mount Olivet, about to enter on the long vigils of the night when, beneath the stars that gleam, purely white, in the eastern sky, He stood—alone—with the Father.

We watched Him in city and gardens, on the hills and in the valley, solitary or amid His disciples; and whenever we saw the halt, the

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maimed, the blind, assemble in pitiful groups, then we knew we should find Him in their midst; and when the living dead, the lepers, came forth from their tombs on the hill of Evil Counsel and gathered in hideous crowds outside the city gates, we knew Jesus of Nazareth was about to pass on the way.

. . . . . .

On the sixth night after the Master's entry into Jerusalem—a fragrant, star-filled night on Kallistos—on the Holy Land the dawn of another perfect spring day,—we were as usual at our post by the telescope, and as usual we were searching with eager glance the streets and byways of Jerusalem.

Once again we watched that magnificent spectacle: sunrise over the Holy City. Once again we saw the coldly-white palaces on Mount Zion glow with tender light at the first touch of the sun; once again we saw the blue doves circle above the Tower of David, that rose so grim and dark over the city, even in the glad light of morning. And in the Prætorium——

There our glance was arrested, and we forgot the hills in their fresh spring garb and the blossoming trees that quivered with joy at the coming of day, for a party of soldiers were entering the outer court of the Roman palace, and in their midst, tightly bound, bruised, and almost broken, walked the Nazarene.

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The Road to Calvary

We had known this hour must come. We had talked about it, dreamt about it since the day of the Master's entry into Jerusalem, awaiting it, yet dreading it with an unnameable dread. And now it had come, and it found us unprepared.

Tremb'ing and numbed with fear, we gazed at the beginning of the world's greatest tragedy. Nay, but the beginning was not there. It had been in the night—our day, while we rested, unconscious, beneath the shelter of the forest,—that on Earth the drama had begun. On Mount Olivet the Master had retired to pray, praying the supreme prayer of agonised humanity: "Father, not my will, but thine be done!" On Mount Olivet the betrayer had come, leading the soldiers of the priests who, with clubs and swords, had taken the Prince of Peace. And now, at sunrise, after a night spent in prison, gaunt, weary, with the livid marks of the scourge seaming his flesh, the prisoner of Caiaphas was led to Pilate—to the Roman trial after the trial of the Jews.

And the day was a day of sunshine and April gladness! And in the streets the people came and went, and in the houses the mothers rocked their babies on their breasts, and in the field the lilies bloomed,—all the land throbbed with life and youth while Christ took his first steps on the road to Golgotha!

In the inner court of the Prætorium were Pilate

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the Roman and Caiaphas the Jew, and before these twain the soldiers brought the Nazarene.

Pilate, governor of Judæa, sat on his high chair of state, as became one who had power of life and death. Caiaphas stood by his side, and other men, doctors of the temple or priests of the central synagogue, were there with him—majestic in their sacerdotal robes—to urge the deed of blood.

The Nazarene stood alone.

We knew the words that were spoken—the angry clamour of the priests: "This man hath proclaimed himself the Messiah! He would destroy the temple: he is worthy of death!"—the subtle accusation of the implacable Caiaphas: "He hath stirred the people to rebellion against Cæsar!"—and later on, when pity touched the Roman's heart, the veiled menace: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend!"

We saw them standing face to face—Pilate and Jesus: Pilate representing the authority and prestige of Rome with its centuries of conquest and splendour, its world-wide sovereignity; and Jesus the Galilean, the peasant, friend of the friendless and sinner, whose doctrine was destined to live and to give life when the vast body of Rome was but a name to be remembered, a glory that once had been.

"What is truth?" the Roman had asked when, later on, the Master spoke of the One who had sent him into the world to bear witness to the

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truth. "What is truth?" And stayed not for an answer.

From Pilate to Herod—from Herod's palace—from the flagellation and the mockery of the soldiers, the robe of state and the crown of thorns—back again to Pilate. The day was now far advanced. The sun beat fiercely on the prisoner's bare head, on the blood that trickled slowly from his brow, on the open wounds that dyed his white tunic with crimson stains.

I could bear the sight no longer. I had a last vision of a group of women standing outside the Prætorium as the bleeding figure of the Nazarene was led out between two soldiers. As through a haze I saw a woman's white face uplifted in agony, a woman's hands outstretched in prayer towards the Master and the Son. . . . Then a sudden faintness overcame me and I covered my face and sobbed.

. . . . . .

Night came, and we knew no more. Night fell over the Holy Land, and on Kallistos the sun rose in his splendour, flooding with white light the purple plains. Slowly we dragged ourselves away from the telescope. Already the heat of the desert was parching our mouths with thirst, and we sought refuge under the high-roofed trees of the oasis, where star-shaped flowers bloomed in the twilight coolness.

But the darkness that had fallen over the Earth

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remained with us. We lived in the past—the ever-present past made visible before our eyes; we were not on Kallistos, in the oasis of the great desert, but within the gates of Jerusalem, in the shadow of the Cross.

We almost dreaded the coming of night, yet each hour of the day seemed an eternity; and when at last our star-sun set in a cloudless sky, on Earth the sun rose over the day of crucifixion.

When the first glow from the East touched the mountains of Jerusalem, a party of Roman soldiers were passing out of the Judicial Gate, with the Nazarene in their midst. A crowd ran ahead, another crowd followed. The narrow street of Damascus was thronged with an eager multitude, all hastening forward to the hill of Calvary.

As I looked at the surging crowd, I felt a curious sense of familiarity with the scene before me—the herd of gaily-garbed men and women jostling each other, pressing and pushing forward in wild haste—little children held high above their mothers' shoulders — dignified Pharisees crushed against courtesans and slaves, yet heeding it not in the universal madness, the delirious going forth of men and women possessed of one idea alone. . . . Ah, I remembered! with a sudden sense of unutterable shame I remembered the crowd of another day—just such a crowd of brightly dressed men and women, just such an eager mob, men pushing women in the fight to see, women lifting

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their little children in their arms. . . . Just such a crowd had I seen, with olive branches and the branches of palms, going forth to meet the Man who was hailed: "Hosanna, Son of David! Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

And now once more, before our eyes, priests of the temple and robbers of the highway, doctors of the law and mountaineers of Galilee, money-lenders of Jerusalem and fishermen of the lakes, mothers in Israel and women who sold their womanhood—wealth and poverty, holiness and sin, inextricably mixed in one seething animal mass, went out gaily to see this Man, this Son of David, die on the cross between two thieves.

For the second time in one week there was a holiday in Israel.

My eyes fell on the Master, staggering beneath the burden of the cross. The crown of thorns—the crown of the Kingdom of Sorrow—still rested over His brow, and His long hair was moistened and entangled with blood. His tunic clung to the wounds on His shoulders; His feet were bare, leaving red patches on the stony path.

As He staggered thus—onward—upward—every faltering step seemed to be His last, every laboured breath seemed a death-cry, so cruelly broken was the body that had spent its strength in loving service unto all.

And not one—no, not one in the crowd—not

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one in all this multitude He had loved unto death, took pity, came forward to staunch His blood, to bathe His wounds, to do unto Him, the supremely merciful One, one little act of mercy!

Yet, later on, where the road to Calvary became narrow and steep, there stood one indeed, one who in spite of priests and soldiers approached the Nazarene and with a kerchief wiped His bleeding face. . . . And that one was a woman.

The crowd that bore in its centre the holy Victim flooded the hill of Calvary, wave upon wave. The moment, of all the moments on Earth the most poignant, had arrived. He who had clad the naked was stripped of His clothes and stood naked before the crowd. The hands that had given sight to the blind, healing to the sick, strength to the maimed, the hands that had caressed the little children in Galilee and been lifted in benediction over all who sinned and sorrowed, were taken in the soldiers' rough grasp and nailed to the wood of the cross.

Was not the silence of the plains in the far-away world where we dwelt, suddenly peopled with all the sounds of Earth? Did we not hear it—dull—rhythmical—the sound of the hammer on the nails?

Did we not hear the low murmur of the expectant multitudes, as hundreds upon hundreds of faces turned as by one accord towards the Figure lifted on the cross? Did we not hear the

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insults and the mockery, the jeers of the priests, the ribaldry of the soldiers—and the wail of women's voices uplifted in agony? And above all, above the tumult of the human storm, did we not hear the last prayer of the dying Nazarene: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

. . . . . .

"And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the land until the ninth hour."

From the East came the clouds in long trails of fleecy whiteness, and over the Holy Land they cast a snowy veil that hid from all the spaces of creation —from all the watchful eyes of men or angels— the last agonies on the cross.

Towards the sunset hour the veil of clouds was rent, even as the veil of the temple, torn in twain at the death of the Master; and with eyes dimmed with tears we watched the descent from the cross, —the reverent hands of the disciples that bore their Master's lifeless body from the tree of torture to the cool peace of the tomb.

"Then took they the body of Jesus and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus."

It was the end. After the joy of the first Christmas night and the singing of the angels—

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after the worship of the Magi and the gifts of gold and rare spices of the East to the King new-born in a manger—after the glad days in Galilee when miracles blossomed like lilies beneath the Master's feet, and the multitudes were fed by His word as by manna in the desert, and gladdened by His presence as by the coming of the sun—after the life of perfect sonship with the Father, of constant loving service to all the children of the Father—after this most blessed life, the purest, the holiest that Earth has ever known or ever shall know,—*this!* The prison, the scourge, the stony pathway to the cross, the crucifixion, and, in the garden on the hill of Calvary, the last services tendered by loving hands—the cool linen clothes and fragrant spices —the mother's last kisses of farewell, then rest —rest in the new-made tomb, in the sepulchre hewn out of the rock wherein no man had yet been laid.

We had followed the way of the cross. We had watched and prayed with the faithful disciples, we had sorrowed with Mary, mother of Jesus, and the saintly women of Galilee. . . . And now it seemed that even as they had despaired, we must despair ; it seemed as if not only the Son of God and of Man, but all the promises of the kingdom, had been enclosed in that tomb that gleamed so ghostly white between the dark camphire bushes of the garden. . . .

Slowly dusk fell over the city, while in our sky

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the morning stars faded, lost in the greater glory of the coming sun. But a message of hope had flashed from the distant Earth with our last glimpse of the Holy Land and the garden on the hillside. No vision of angels came to gladden our sight, no heavenly choir sang the promise of the joy that was to come; yet in the great stillness of the plains methinks I heard the joyful tidings clearly spoken: "O Death! where is thy sting? O Death! where is thy victory?"

"*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*"

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CHAPTER XII

"RESURREXIT"

THE next day was a Sabbath.

"When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him.

"And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun."

"The morning brightened over Moab's peaks,
Touched the great Temple's dome with crimson fires,
Lit Ophel and Moriah rosy-red,
Made Olivet all gold, and on the pools
In Hinnom laid a sudden lance of flame.
And from the thorn-trees brake the waking-songs
Of little birds; and every palm-tree's top
Was full of doves that cooed, as knowing not
How Love was dead, and Life's dear glory gone,
And world's hope lay there in the tomb with Him. . . ."

The tomb was hidden in the shadow of the trees.

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The camphire bushes and the wild terebinths bent their branches above it, and, star-like in the gloom, white cyclamens blossomed at the entrance of the cave.

Close to the sepulchre, in a spot where the hillside was bared to the sun, a woman knelt alone, her face hidden in her hands, her veil, half detached, revealing a gleam of gold in her disordered hair. At some little distance from her, other women stood in the attitude of prayer, with fingers interlaced and faces upturned to the sky. . . . With them was a young Galilean, a tall, frail youth with pale hair and dreamy eyes. . . . We had seen him many times, in the city and on the hills—and at the foot of the cross with Mary, mother of Jesus—and in our hearts we called him John, he whom the Master loved.

They stood there—the mother—the friends—the disciple. . . . They wept, they prayed, and all the world seemed hushed.

The sun rose higher in the heavens. A sudden tremor, like a breath from the Unseen, passed through the garden on the hillside, bending almost to the ground the branches of the olive trees and the terebinths, bringing close together, as for the whispering of joyful tidings, the white flower-faces that guarded the tomb.

There came a light beneath the trees.

The woman who knelt all alone bowed her head to the ground in an extremity of anguish,

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and her long hair trailed over the dew-moistened grass and mingled with the fresh-opened blossoms. John, the beloved disciple, seeing her thus, left the women who were praying and came towards her with swift steps. . . . He came. . . . He stood so close to her that his hands might have touched her, when suddenly he stood still. . . . He gazed—not at the bowed figure by his side, but far ahead, in the gloom beneath the camphire bushes. . . .

A light shone in the gloom. . . . It deepened with every second that passed, as deepens the radiance of the stars when the veil of night has fallen.

And the light took a shape—and it was as the shape of a man—or a god.

The bowed figure of the woman who had sinned felt the Presence and the light, even as with closed eyes we feel the touch of the sun on our faces. . . . She lifted her head. . . . We felt the sudden thrill of her ecstasy. . . . She rose, she ran, she fell at His feet, weeping for joy.

"Master!"

John stood still and rigid, his head thrown back, his hands outstretched, like a man in a trance.

And the light—the Presence—came towards him. If a man, why the glory, as of spiritual essences? If a god, why the marks of the nails on His hands and feet?

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"Master!"

The cry of Mary broke the spell at last. Like a bell calling to worship, like a clarion-call to victory, it must have sounded in the Sabbath stillness of the hills, proclaiming to the Holy City and to the hills beyond—and to all the earth and all the ages to come—that death is but a name, and man is immortal, even as God.

John heard it and fell, sobbing, at his Master's feet; the holy women heard it, and their sorrow was changed to joy; Mary, mother of Jesus, heard it, and, kneeling before her Son, she worshipped the God in the man.

"The Lord is arisen!"

The news spread like fire, leapt like flames, from the hill to the city. "We have seen the Lord: The Lord is arisen!" The disciples who mourned in Jerusalem heard the joyful tidings, and came to the garden on the hill; and they half doubted and half believed, and were joyful and sad in turn; for although the light still shone as a celestial afterglow in the faces of those who had seen the Master, the Presence had vanished:

"But Him they saw not,"

And the cool peace under the wild terebinths was undisturbed by footfalls of angel or man.

But we, watchers in the sky, we who, across Time and Space, had witnessed the dawn of the first Easter morn, we had heard at last, clearly spoken, the message sent from the little planet

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Earth to all the silent, waiting spaces of Creation :— the answer to Humanity's eternal query : Is Death the end of Life?

In a clear voice the words of faith and hope were spoken across the Void :—

"*The gift of God is Eternal Life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

And in mystic tones, unperceived by human senses, all the planets and all the stars in space rejoiced, singing in unison the song of Man to God :—

"Praise ye the Lord!

"Praise, O ye servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord!

"Blessëd be the name of the Lord, from this time forth and for evermore!"

On Earth Man bowed his head and answered softly : "*Amen.*"

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CHAPTER XIII

DREAMLAND

THE days—I might almost say the months — which followed that glad Easter morn stand in my memory as a dream-like succession of slow days and nights.

We all know that peculiar state of existence which is not sleep and yet is not waking, when the mind, like the body, lies passive, inert, yet dreamily conscious all the while, as if the soul were shrouded in a semi-transparent veil. This state became mine when, the high flame of excitement having burnt itself out, the inevitable reaction came, and all the hardships and privations, all the doubt and anxiety of the past months, made their influence felt at last with sudden fierceness.

A slow, steady fever crept into my very marrow, making me weak as a child, weak in body and mind, indifferent to everything and but dimly conscious of my own personality. Strange, distorted fancies flitted through my brain. I was in

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the past, I was in the present. I was on Earth, in Palestine, sitting on the shadowy terraces of a temple of dreams. I was on Kallistos, in the beautiful valley, and in the forest of flowers I gathered impalpable blossoms, striving vainly to weave them into garlands to deck Estrella's brow. It was not delirium, for I was conscious of the phantasies, and could even smile at them when my eyes were opened, but as soon as my lids closed I was once more in the land of waking dreams.

One idea, one feeling alone, stood steadfast in the chaos of my thoughts—an immense, an unutterable longing to be on Earth again, to be my old self once more, just once, and not a wanderer in other worlds, not a pilgrim in bygone ages—only myself, plain Clive Delafield who hoped to make his way in the kingdom of Letters with the sweetest of women by his side.

Little by little, the visions that haunted me became less shadowy, and more oppressive. I felt stifled in the shelter of the forest, as if a thousand invisible creatures were sharing its bowers with me, pressing against me with heavy yet impalpable forms. The arched alleys became a prison wall ; the vast plain outside, a desert teeming with unknown, unseen horrors.

For many days no food passed my lips, but whenever thirst roused me from my torpor I found Roy bending over me with a flower-cup filled with cool water.

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A time of utter oblivion followed these days, and when I awoke once more to semi-consciousness it was to hear Roy say as he bent close over me: "Take courage, Clive, dear boy: you will soon be on Earth again, in the old home, with Estrella and the little mother!"

The words were like a sudden call to life. I rose from my bed of leaves, clear-headed, though still giddy and faint.

"Roy," I gasped, "Roy, what do you mean? Are we going back to Earth? When? How?"

I was prepared for any glad and wondrous tidings, and had Roy told me that the *Estrella* stood outside the forest arches, ready to leap to Earth in one thousandth part of the time it had taken to come to Kallistos, I would have believed him and rejoiced.

But Roy was silent, and seemed even to hesitate about an answer. I repeated my question.

"Are we going home, Roy? Are we going back to Earth,—soon?"

There was another moment's silence, and then, with eyes averted, Roy replied in a constrained voice:

"*You* will return, Clive, yes,—and soon, I hope!"

I felt the blood rush to my face. I was still very weak, and for a moment I felt as if my heart had stopped beating.

"Roy?" I said,—and could say no more.

He took my hands in his.

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"You are ill, Clive,—no, you are better now, you are almost well—but you have been ill, and in your delirium you have called on Estrella a hundred times! Night and day you have babbled of Earth—England and home! You must return, Clive! It cut me to the heart to hear you, I who have taken you from everything, everyone, you love——"

"No, no," I interrupted hastily, "you know it is not so, Roy!"

"But it is, Clive! I have not dragged you away by force, and yet—you know what I mean—it was a sacrifice always, but you made it for my sake—and Estrella's."

There were many things I could have said, yet I was silent. Roy continued with a half smile:

"I have been a shameless old egotist, and it is time I did penance for my sins. My penance will be to send you back to Earth!"

"Roy! How can you talk so wildly? I shall never return to Earth without you! Oh, but you cannot mean it, Roy! You cannot mean to remain here for ever,—for ever, Roy!"

Roy attempted to laugh, but there was no smile in his eyes as he looked full at me, still holding my hands in his.

"I never said that I would stay here always," he said in a low voice; "but if you will think for one moment, Clive, you must see that our return to Earth—together—is an impossibility."

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"Why impossible?" I asked, and my voice shook with fear of his reply.

"*Who will start the machine?*"

In the long silence which followed this question, I could hear the far-off rush of the river as it swept past in its hurried way to the unknown sea. . . . I heard, close by, the motion of transparent wings as some insect tribe flitted by under the golden arcades of the forest. . . . I tried to speak, but my lips refused to utter a word, even as my brain seemed incapable of shaping a rational thought.

Roy saw my mental confusion.

"We will talk it over some other time, when you are rested," he said gently, as he placed under my head a fresh pillow of fragrant leaves. "Sleep now, if you can—and dream of Earth," he added with a sigh and a smile, as he slowly moved away.

. . . . . .

Five months later we stood once more in the beautiful valley wherein we had landed after our journey across space, and our eyes were gladdened by the familiar outlines of the *Estrella* standing untouched, unharmed, by the side of the mountain stream.

The sight of it was like a breath of home to world-weary wanderers—and wanderers we were in very truth—and weary beyond the power of words to tell.

If our expedition from the north to the south of the planet had been a perilous enterprise, our

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return journey from south to north was even more dangerous and difficult of accomplishment.

There was no swift-flowing river to carry us to our journey's end ; and we were compelled to toil, by night, in the sand of the desert, from oasis to oasis—then came the hills, and beyond them the mountains—the slow climbing, a little every day, of peak after peak—the weariness, the fever, the thirst that nothing could quench, the awful fear of falling by the wayside at last, exhausted, half-dead—shall I ever forget it ?

When I think—now—of what we accomplished then—of the hundreds of miles we traversed on foot in an unknown world, through desert spaces and mountain passes, with insufficient food, and clothing almost in rags, it seems to me that our journey from the northern to the southern hemisphere of Kallistos was almost as wonderful an achievement as our pilgrimage across space.

On Earth the task would have been an impossible one ; for even if we had not perished by the way, worn-out and famished, we would have fallen an easy prey to some wild beasts from the desert or the jungle.

But on Kallistos, not only was the air of so fine a quality that one seemed to gain strength by the mere act of breathing, but everything intimated the fact which Roy afterwards promulgated as a law, namely, that while on Earth animals prey on animals all the world over, on Kallistos the animal

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preyed on the plant, the plant in its turn preyed on the animal (for little by little we made the curious discovery that all plants were carnivorous), but no animal ever preyed on another animal, or a plant on another plant. Each kingdom, animal and vegetal, was at peace with itself—which, as Roy remarked, was a distinct advance on the conditions prevailing on Earth.

Thus we passed, unharmed, through animal tribes of every shape and stature: some closely resembling the creatures of Earth; others, fantastic monsters such as no eyes of man have ever seen; others again, almost human in form and demeanour, and presenting an almost faithful copy of the monkey-men we had first seen in the forest of flowers.

It was a curious and by no means unwelcome coincidence that the first representative of the animal world we beheld on our arrival in the valley should have been our little friend of long ago—he whom Roy had christened *Lalou*, and hailed as the forerunner of man on Kallistos.

There he sat, pensively reclining against the aluminium walls of the *Estrella*, seemingly sad, yet not so sad that he could not, from time to time, enjoy a bite off his favourite finger-plants, growing in riotous profusion all around him. For some time we watched him in silence, interested and amused, then Roy gave a call: "Lalou!"

The little creature lifted his head, gazed at us

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for some moments in incredulous, delighted wonder, then with a shrill cry he rose and ran towards us, his body quivering with eagerness, his dark eyes burning with joy.

I felt curiously moved. Where we had thought ourselves strangers in a strange land, we found a friend ; where we thought ourselves alone, we received a welcome more eloquent than spoken words. After an absence of nearly ten months, he not only remembered us, but remembered to love us, and, more touching still, remembered why he loved us. With rapid pantomime he touched his knee where the wound had been, laughed into Roy's face as a child might have done that is pleased with itself and all the world, then straightway danced around us, clapping his hands and shouting with all the delightful abandon of a savage in high glee.

It was wonderful to watch him—more wonderful still when, some minutes later, he pointed to the *Estrella* and then upwards to the sky, either to intimate, as he had done once before, that we had dropped from the clouds in our strange machine, or else to ask whether we intended to leave the planet by the same celestial route. As Roy remarked when we followed our little friend inside the *Estrella,* he only lacked speech to be a man—and even this was not totally lacking, since already he translated some of his thoughts and feelings into articulate sound.

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Ah, the delight of finding, after our long absence, the home-nest undisturbed and peaceful! The joy of rediscovering every cherished possession, of rummaging among the well-worn books, of fingering with anxious care every part of the dynamo and machines that were to send me back to Earth! I confess that in spite of weakness and ill-health, I felt almost as elated as our little companion Lalou, and was not far from expressing my joy in as unconventional and boisterous a manner.

Lalou had apparently decided in his own little mind that he would not be parted from us a second time, and for fear that we might escape unperceived, seemed determined not to leave us out of sight. Throughout that day he followed us as persistently as our own shadows; and when at nightfall he suddenly disappeared, it was only—somewhat to our dismay—to return, bringing with him quite a small tribe of his fellow-creatures. We were about to protest vigorously against this intrusion, when we saw there was no need, as yet, to assume a defensive attitude. The little tribe advanced to within a few feet of our air-boat, and then, as if at a given signal, halted abruptly. Lalou alone came forward and with solemn mien ascended the rope-ladder, which, since our return, was once more suspended from the open doors of the *Estrella*. Evidently he alone considered himself privileged to enter our presence, and his companions, like

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well-drilled soldiers, remained at a respectful distance.

And so we spent the first night of our return in the valley, peacefully sleeping in the azure radiance that fell from the moon, and protected by a silent guard of watchful, white-haired creatures that were no longer animals, and were not yet men.

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CHAPTER XIV

FAREWELL TO KALLISTOS

E spent a month together, Roy and I, in the beautiful valley—a month, for me, of physical rest and mental unrest,—until at last one morning we watched, together for the last time, the sun rise in his glory over the distant, snow-clad peaks.

"Next time you see the sun rise," Roy said quietly, "it will be another sun, rising above another planet!"

I did not answer him. My longing to return to Earth had not diminished; indeed, I had often felt of late that any obstacle placed in the way of my going would have unhinged my mind, so famished was I for a sight of all I had left behind me. But as the moment of departure approached, the thought of leaving Roy—*abandoning* seemed at times the truer word—weighed on me like a burden of sin.

At the eve of starting I still half hesitated.

"I cannot bear to leave you here alone, Roy!"

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I exclaimed, when, the last preparations completed, there was nothing to do but wait—and think.

"I shall not be alone," he answered with his quiet smile. "Lalou is with me,—and there will be others. . . . You see how already these creatures creep close to us, throbbing with curiosity. . . . I shall make men of them! Think of it, Clive: I shall see what all the thinkers and scientists of Earth would give their right hand to behold: the dawn of humanity,—the slow evolution of man from the brute. Look at Lalou: already he gazes with wonder at the sun and the stars; already, when he lifts his eyes to the heavens, there is a question in them. . . . The next step will be worship—and the monkey will have become a man!"

"And yet, Roy——"

"No," he interrupted firmly, "we will not discuss the obvious, Clive,—at least," he added in a lighter tone, "not on this, the last day we are together! Since we cannot both return, I must be the one to remain. . . . You will go back to Earth. You will tell them of all the wonders we have seen, and, I think I may add, the wonders we have accomplished. . . . You will continue my work, Clive! And when my notes are published, and my machines exhibited—in one word, when my discovery is made known to all, why, then distance will no longer exist, and men will pass from world to world almost as easily as the bird flits from branch to branch! You and Estrella,

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and certainly Lord Vynne, will come, some day, to visit me. . . . By then I shall have taught Lalou, or one of his brothers, to launch the air-boat into space. . . . And so I shall return, with you all, to Earth!"

We were sitting in the open space by the stream, close to the spot where the *Estrella*, brought once more into the horizontal position, stood ready for the long journey across space. The sun had risen above the mountains, shedding his white radiance over the golden valley. To me it seemed at that moment as if my life on Kallistos had been a dream; it seemed as if a mist of curious unreality enveloped all this wondrous world, turning its strange beauty into something dream-like, visionary, a beauty impalpable and but faintly remembered, as of sights seen before birth, visions gazed on with eyes that are not in the flesh.

Roy's voice, calm as ever, awoke me from my reverie.

"No," he was saying meditatively, "I shall not be alone. . . . You know I love this world, this wonderful new world we have discovered. . . . I feel it mine, all mine, as if I were its creator. . . . Alone? Why, Clive—alone, when all creation lies as an open book before me?"

"But we left the telescope behind us, in the desert," I murmured, thinking with regret of the beautiful instrument we had been compelled to abandon in the southern hemisphere.

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"Oh, I shall return to the desert," was Roy's prompt reply.

"And remain there?" I exclaimed hastily.

"Not necessarily so. I will take Lalou with me—and some of the others, perhaps—and we shall be but clumsy creatures if between us we do not manage to bring back my telescope!"

"I wish you would make this valley your home," I said anxiously, "for it does seem to be the planet's Garden of Eden."

"Yes, I shall pitch my tent here, I think—when I have journeyed to the desert,—for the telescope I *must* have! . . . You know how already on Earth I discovered with it many new worlds, not merely new planets or new suns, but complete universes, planet upon planet, star upon star! . . . Here, where in very truth we see 'a new heaven and a new earth,' I may discover—ah, what may I not discover! Anything, everything, even to the Centre of the Universe,—that myth, or reality, dreamt of by astronomers and philosophers of all ages."

I smiled at Roy's enthusiasm, so like that of the boy-dreamer of old.

He continued musingly:

"I hope to perfect my theory of the ever-ascending scale of creation—Darwin's law of evolution applied not only to our planet, but to all the planets in infinite space, and embracing the mental, the spiritual, as well as the material development of the Universe."

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"You mean——?"

"I mean that unless we deny a Supreme Idea working *in* and *through* creation, we can hardly refuse to believe that every world is as one note in an upward scale, and the progress of its humanity as a vast crescendo that will continue until the perfect chord—the last AMEN—is sung through all the spheres. . . . 'Creation,' says Flammarion, 'is an immense ascension of the creatures towards the Creator.' In this slow ascension—slow, for its time is eternity—every humanity must have its place as one step in

> "The great world's altar-stairs
> That slope thro' darkness up to God."

The idea is not mine—*nil novi sub sole!* The famous German astronomer, Bode, conceived the Universe as an infinity of circles, sphere within sphere, wherein every degree, from the centre to the circumference, was a degree nearer perfection. . . . It has been the dream of astronomers and poets. . . . But so far as absolute knowledge goes, all we know—or rather all we have hitherto known—is that in our solar system we, the Earth, are one of the smallest and most insignificant of worlds. . . . What are we, little planet, compared with the giants of our system—Jupiter, king of the heavens—Saturn, with his diadem of luminous rings and his train of satellites? We know that the physical conditions prevailing on our planet are far

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from perfect; we know, only too well, that our humanity is steeped in sorrow and sin."

"Well," I interposed, "our terrestrial habitation is imperfect, and our humanity is imperfect. Query:—Would a perfect, or nearly perfect world, be the dwelling-place of a perfect humanity?"

"Until now," Roy replied quickly, "we have had no means of answering this question; but my telescope reveals these far-away planets, dependencies of other suns, other universes: it brings their humanities within our ken! As you know, I have so far seen but a few of these distant worlds, studied but a few of these alien humanities; but this I may already affirm—that the development of man, physical and intellectual, is always parallel with the development of the world he lives in. Only—it is so little I have done as yet! I have studied several planets—and the number of worlds is infinite! But this also I may affirm,—that our Earth—indeed all our system—is one of the lowest in the scale of creation—yet not the lowest,—no, for I have seen worlds that to us would seem a hell! And I have seen worlds that were like Paradise made visible!"

We were silent for a while, until Roy quoted, slowly, those well-known lines of Tennyson:

"One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves. . . ."

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"But is it fair," I asked doubtingly, "is it in accordance with our idea of a Supreme Being, that some part of His creation should be poor, dark, disinherited, while others rejoice in a heritage of light and beauty?"

"Is it fair," retorted Roy, "that on Earth one man should be strong, another weak—one woman beautiful, another plain? To answer one question will be to answer the other. . . . So far no one has answered either, for we only see, we only hold, one link in the chain of life. . . . To judge wisely we must see the *All*—the All whom no mortal eyes have seen. . . . The Hindus have dreamed of it—the 'Higher Pantheism' has proclaimed it:—the unity of all life, not merely of all terrestrial, but of all celestial life, the life which binds together the dewdrop and the sun, the flower at our feet with the remotest star in infinite space."

"It is a beautiful dream, but——"

"*Is* it only a dream? We can neither prove nor disprove that this dream is not a splendid reality,—that life, considered as a spiritual essence, breath of the Divine, does not rise from the lowest forms to the highest, in the ever-ascending scale of creation—'unconscious in the mineral, conscious in the plant, self-conscious in the animal —God-conscious in man. . . .' A dream? Yes! But is not every truth born as a dream? . . . This must be my life-work henceforward: to trace, throughout the limitless universe, this slow,

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patient 'ascension of the creatures towards the Creator.'"

After another moment's silence, he added thoughtfully: "What I do here, you may do on Earth. . . . We can work side by side, Clive, although the universe lie between us! We can both work at bringing a little light to our dark world!"

I sighed restlessly, as if a burden had been laid on my shoulders which I found too heavy to bear.

"It is so little we can do," I murmured, "so little we ever do, even the best of us! A little work,—a little pleasure,—a little striving after fame or fortune,—a little seeking for friendship or for love,—everything is small in our life!"

"Except our dreams," said Roy. "But do you feel discouraged because it is so? Remember that if we *do* little, we *are* little—our world is little, our universe itself is but a little part of Infinity! We are only atoms, but, thank God! atoms that think—and an atom that knows itself an atom, is greater than an Infinity that knows not it is infinite."

Roy was silent for a moment, as if in deep thought; then he continued: "You will tell them all this when you return to Earth; you will describe all these wonders we have discovered; but before all, Clive, you must tell them of the vision that came to us in the desert: you must tell them of the drama of Calvary. It is good,

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it is necessary for man to know some of the marvels of this universe he lives in ; yet I believe that as long as man is man only, as long as he has not risen to higher destinies, the best he can know is that the Ideal Man has lived on Earth, and hallowed the world with His footsteps. . . . Indeed, Clive, the deeper I think, the more clearly do I see that it *is* the highest and best that men may know ; and if you can make them realise this, if when you tell our story it brings one sinful soul nearer to the One who lived and died sinless, then, Clive, I shall feel my work was not in vain."

I made no answer, but listened to his words as a disciple might listen to the last message spoken by his Master.

I realised then, as I had perhaps never realised it before, that all the indescribable pageant of the universe that we had witnessed,—the fiery multitude of stars, the magnificence of all the planets, abodes of life and intelligence,—all were to Roy but as a splendid background to humanity's supreme episode — the drama that had been enacted over nineteen hundred years ago on the little planet Earth.

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CHAPTER XV

ALONE!

NCE more I stood in readiness by the *Estrella's* side, waiting for Roy to give the signal to start.

Throughout the day Roy had been so self-possessed and calm that his demeanour had subdued even my own agitation; but at the moment of parting, when I stepped—alone—into the air-boat, and Roy stood at the door, watching me, my courage almost deserted me, and I verily believe I could have sobbed like a woman. How quiet Roy was! How calm! At that moment it seemed as if he were so far removed from frail humanity that its heart-beats and its anguish could not touch him—as if he stood alone on the height, like some colossal statue of a god,—impassive, serene.

"Ready?" he asked briefly, and his voice was firm.

I could not answer him, save by an indistinct murmur.

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He held out his hand. He looked into my eyes.

"Good-bye."

The door slid on its hinges, shutting me off from the sunshine and the world, and with a wild cry of despair I flung myself against it, shouting vainly: "Roy! Roy!" For in that last glance at his face I had read his soul, and seen the sudden agony that dimmed his eyes.

"Roy!"

Ah, too late! Too late! I sprang to the window: Night and the stars! I was in space once more, and Kallistos shone in the far distance like a small star in the night.

. . . . . .

Thus began my second, my solitary journey into space. I was alone, alone in a solitude which no solitude of Earth can give any idea of: alone without the companionship even of a dog or a cat, of a bird twittering above my head, of the wind among the forest leaves, of the friendly greeting of the sunshine at morn—alone without one sight or sound of a living thing about me!

For months I fought against the demon of despair, but little by little I felt him gaining the mastery, and with the first fear of defeat all my strength welled from me like blood from a wound. I believe I was mad for a time. I forced myself to read, but words had lost their meaning, and I turned page after page with my mind in a

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trance; then suddenly I would awaken, recollect myself, throw the book from me, and leap like a caged beast round and round my prison. Ah, it was a prison so secure that no Grand Inquisitor of old ever devised for his victims so implacable a captivity! I was imprisoned by every law of Nature, helpless human atom in the toils of the incomprehensible forces of creation; the eternal night, the eternal silence of space, like unnameable ghosts, pressed close against my prison-walls, and looked in with haunting, unfathomable eyes. . . . I was broken, like the insect of a day, on the wheel of Eternity.

Sometimes the idea flashed through my brain that it must all be a dream, and I would laugh aloud, and cry, and laugh again. . . . So wonderful a dream—ah, but so terrible an one! Would it never end? It seemed to have lasted so long, so very long,—longer than any dream ever dreamt by man. . . . God! Would I never wake?

At times I was mad, and those intervals of madness were to me as welcome as sleep, for they meant momentary forgetfulness, and I knew no other rest in those days. Stupor and despair—the semi-unconsciousness of stupor, the wild agitation of despair—in this strange world that was no world, in the ever-dark, ever-silent, ever-empty spaces where there was no day and no night, this was my only division of time: I awoke to unnameable horrors, and it was day: I sank into a

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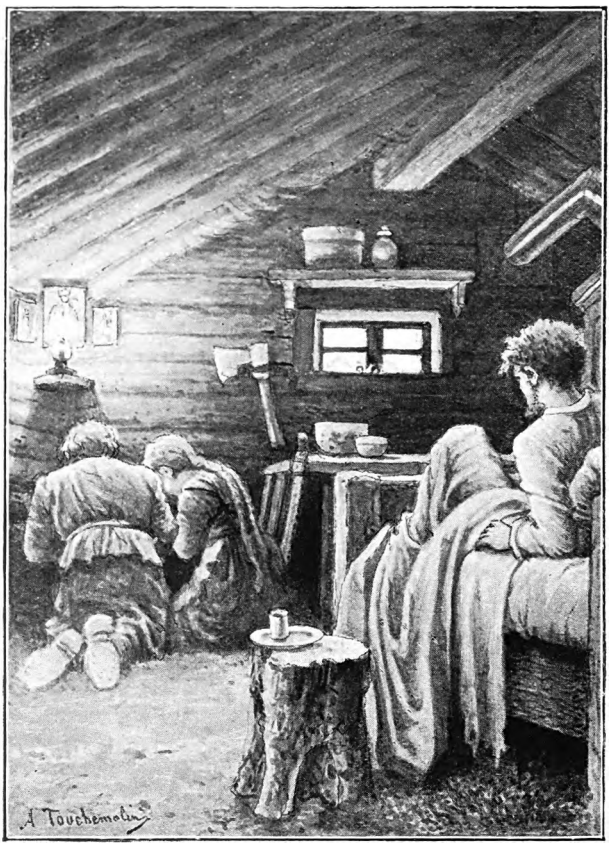

"With an effort I turned towards the light"

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dreamless trance, and it was night. Stupor alternating with despair! It is all I can remember of these last days. . . . Gradually the despair lessened—stupor became my normal condition. I ceased to make even the mechanical effort of stretching out my hand for food. . . . The light of the electric lamp seemed to grow dim, and ever dimmer, and—— I remember nothing more.

. . . . . .

When I awoke to semi-conscious life, before my eyes were opened to the twilight of a winter's evening, my first distinct impression was that of sound—a sound low, soft, monotonous, like human voices uplifted in prayer. . . . Human voices! A new life stirred in me at the thought. Although my soul was still in the tangle of half-remembered dreams, yet I knew it was a long, a very long time since a human voice had greeted me, since a human hand had clasped my own.

Eagerly I looked about me, eagerly I listened. The murmurous noise grew louder: I distinguished words, but they conveyed no meaning to my senses.

Little by little, as my eyes grew familiar with the semi-obscurity, I saw myself in a small, square room, partly lit by a faint glow in the room itself, partly by the last glimmer of twilight entering through the uncurtained window.

With an effort I turned towards the inner light. At the further end of the room, on the walls of

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bare, rough wood, everywhere else undecorated, three pictures in vivid colours stood out in clear relief against the surrounding gloom. The central and largest one represented a woman with a little child in her arms; and both the woman and the child wore a crown of glory. In front of the pictures a small lamp burned with a steady flame.

I know not what fragments of thought, what broken memories, thrilled within me at this sight. A mist rose before my eyes, and for a moment darkness again closed around me.

When I looked once more towards the light, I saw that I was not alone: two dark shapes, almost hidden in the shadow of the lamp, were kneeling before the pictures.

Human creatures in worship! The dimness that still hung over my mind was torn like clouds by a lightning flash. I understood. I remembered.

Involuntarily I glanced towards the window. Night had fallen, and through the small, blurred panes the stars shone radiantly. As I met their clear, cold stare,

> "Watching, with eternal lids apart,
> Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite. . . ."

I trembled in sudden fear, as if they were beckoning me, irresistibly, to the eternal, silent spaces I had left.

Thank God! I was on Earth again! Bruised and

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wounded, as a bird that had wandered too far for the strength of its wings, I had come home at last, and with a song of thanksgiving rising in my heart, I turned my eyes from the cold brilliancy of the heavens to the little lamp that burnt before the image of the Madonna and Child.

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CHAPTER XVI

IN HOLY RUSSIA

IT took me some time to discover that the *Estrella* had fallen close to the Siberian frontier, some seven miles to the north-east of Ekaterinburg, in the province of Perm.

When the man and the woman rose from their evening devotions before the sacred images, and saw me staring at them with wide-open eyes, their first movement seemed a continuation of their prayer, for with joy in their rugged faces they crossed themselves devoutly. The woman came close to me and pointed to the Madonna on the wall, with a flow of rapid language, probably explaining that from the Beloved Mother had come my deliverance. The man nodded gravely, and in his turn spoke a few words which to me were equally unintelligible.

I smiled and said: "I am English. I do not understand Russian." For their dwelling, their

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costume, their features, no less than their prostrations before the holy Icon, revealed them as Muscovite peasants.

There was a moment's silence, during which the two old people looked at me attentively, as if hoping my face would somehow betray my meaning; then they conversed with each other in low tones—a useless precaution—after which the man came to my bedside and gravely offered his hand. I took it with some surprise, and he shook it in a hearty clasp, muttering something the while in a solemn tone. Only later, when I had become more familiar with Russian peasant life, did I learn how the mujick welcomes his guest with the perfect hospitality of the man who has little, and offers his little with good grace, sharing with the needy wanderer his barley bread and his salt, saying, in answer to all thanks: "The stranger is the one whom God sends."

The old man stood before me in silence for some minutes, then he spoke the one word, "Dmitri"; and turning towards the woman he added, "Marfa."

I understood the simple introduction, and in my turn gave my name. *Delafield* was beyond them, but *Clive* seemed intelligible, and first the man and then the woman repeated it with a smile of approval. This elementary rite of all social intercourse once accomplished, they both retired to the farther end of the room, where the man sat gazing

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abstractedly into the red-hot stove, while the woman busied herself with preparations for the evening meal.

Left to myself, I looked in turn at the room and at my hosts with eyes half closed, and thoughts sometimes near, sometimes far away from, the little isba * on the Russian steppe. Both man and wife looked to their finger-tips what in France one calls *de brave gens* ; the man with his rough-hewn features, his long, unkempt beard and hair, his slow, awkward movements, was a typical figure of the Russian peasant—that cross between the patriarch and the serf. His broad shoulders had the stoop which comes of long centuries of servitude, of bending over the soil, and under the master's hand ; and in his eyes was the patient look of the men who do not think—only feel. She also—Marfa, his wife—was a typical peasant woman, sturdy, strong-limbed and masculine, as women become when they do the work of men and till the soil by their side during the best years of their life. There was about both an air of simple dignity that was a welcome in itself.

So far, I knew nothing of my present position, save that I had fallen into the hands of people who were hospitable and poor ; but, strange to say, I cared little where or with whom I was, for I knew myself once more on Earth, and the knowledge made me glad. I was still too weak either to

* Small house built entirely of wood.

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desire exertion or to trouble about the morrow. The room was warm, and the low voices of the mujick and his wife made a soft undertone to the glad tidings that rang in my head.

With a sigh of utter contentment I closed my eyes and fell into a dreamless sleep.

. . . . . .

A cheery voice awoke me the next morning, just as a shaft of pale wintry sun made its way into the room. A stranger was bending over me —a blue-eyed giant covered from head to foot in snow and furs, with straw-coloured hair and a good-humoured face as red as an autumn berry—a vision of Santa Claus in the days of his youth; and the sight which the half-opened door revealed, of a waiting sledge outside, added the last touch to the resemblance.

His first words to me were in Russian, consequently unintelligible.

I shook my head with a smile.

"I am an Englishman: don't *you* speak English?"

It was his turn to express a silent but regretful negation, and for some moments we looked at each other in smiling embarrassment.

The situation might have become ridiculous, had I not remembered that all educated Russians speak French, and French I knew tolerably well.

"*Parlez-vous français?*" I queried in the orthodox exercise-book manner. But, alas, the

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blond giant knitted his brow, and with an accent infinitely worse than my own, stammered: "Oh, non—pas—presque pas . . ."

As a last resource I hazarded: "*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" And to my great delight his face expanded in a broad smile as he readily answered: "*Ya, gewiss, ya, Deutsch spreche Ich wohl!*"

And so—in the language of Goethe, Schiller, and Heine—the stranger told me what I had already guessed, namely, that he was the doctor fetched in all haste by the mujick and his wife, some days back, to mend the badly-broken intruder who had so unceremoniously fallen into their midst. If I plied him with eager questions as to the time and manner of my descent, may easily be imagined, but my curiosity was only satisfied after many long German words had been repeated, many heavy periods made lighter for my comprehension. For the doctor, who had studied at the Ulm University, spoke German with appalling fluency, and so rapidly, whenever he became excited, that I was left to hobble lamely after him in a vain endeavour to follow. At last, however, out of the long maze of winding sentences, I disentangled the naked truth, and with outward gravity and inward merriment heard the wonderful story of the military balloon which, after the first experiments made on the shores of Lake Constance, had suddenly broken from its bonds and, after a

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wild flight over Europe, had fallen in this remote part of Eastern Russia.

"You can imagine," the good doctor continued, with evident enjoyment of his own narrative, "the dismay of our peasantry when, last Monday at noon, you and your air-ship fell on the outskirts of the village! Some thought it was a new form of infernal machine, a gigantic bomb invented by the Nihilists for the swift destruction of the Empire; but the majority inclined to the belief that it must be a fearful sign from Heaven to announce the end of the world. Had it not been for me, who had followed with the greatest interest the career of this new air-ship, and immediately recognised it from the descriptions I had read, you might have been left to perish inside it before anyone would have dared to meddle with the monster! Ah, but our peasants are so credulous! And"—my young Santa Claus prudently lowered his voice—"if I were to tell you the difficulties raised by our governor—I mean the governor of Ekaterinburg—before he would allow the workmen to break open the balloon and so release you from your captivity,—why, the worshipful governor himself was persuaded at first that we had to deal with some kind or other of infernal machine! And"—here his voice dropped quite to a whisper—"it was just 'touch and go' with him, whether you were lodged that night in our military prison, or in the house of these good

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people who have taken such kindly care of you!"

"Indeed?" I said as calmly as I could, and meditated over this new form of welcome which Mother Earth had been so near bestowing on her long-lost son.

Thus, little by little, I was told where I was, and with whom, and how many days had gone by since I had dropped from the clouds, and the strange manner of my coming; in short, I learnt all that had happened and all that might have happened to me on my return from my celestial journey.

Undoubtedly the least welcome item in the budget of news which my doctor so willingly detailed, was that I must not dream of a removal before another six weeks at least, since in my fall, or rather in the fall of my air-boat, I had not only fractured my knee, but slightly injured my spine, and rest was an absolute necessity.

"But we can make you quite comfortable here," my new friend added cheerfully, "and by-and-by you could be removed to my house—in Ekaterinburg — on a stretcher. And if your friends do not live too far from here, why, one or the other could come for a while to keep you company—and so the time would not seem so long, would it?"

I thought of one whose presence would have shortened the longest captivity, and I felt the blood surge to my face as I answered: "There is

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only one whom I should care to see—and to this one I will write."

. . . . . .

Ah, the gladness, the joy of sledge-bells on a clear winter's day! Has anyone heard them, and not loved the sound for ever? Across the great white plains they came, nearer, ever nearer, as the horses leapt silently over the frozen snow, and the silvery bells rang a joyful chime in the great stillness of the steppe. . . . Nearer, ever nearer, until the sound ended in a last triumphant peal, and Estrella, my Estrella, entered the room, followed by Lord Vynne, and ran into my arms.

From that day my recovery was rapid, and soon, sooner than the doctor had hoped or predicted, I was able to sit at table with Estrella and my good friends the mujick and his wife; for, in spite of the doctor's proffered hospitality, I elected to remain with the kindly old people who had given me so cordial a welcome, and continued to treat me with every mark of consideration and good-will.

With the usual open-hearted Russian hospitality, Estrella had been made welcome in another *isba* of the village—if village the few scattered huts could be called—and every morning she came in with the sun, bringing a breath of the snowy, wind-swept plains into the close room where my days and nights were spent. . . . But the time came when I was allowed to take my first glimpse of the outside world, and, wrapped from head to foot in a warm

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dakha, enjoy a short drive in the doctor's sledge, with Estrella—my head nurse, as she liked to be called—by my side. And so day by day the drives were lengthened, until one morning at sunrise, with many parting benedictions from the mujick and his wife, for the last time we left behind us the doors of the hospitable *isba*.

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CONCLUSION

A YEAR has passed since then, and Estrella is my wife. We live in the old Jersey home, and Mrs Staunton bravely tries to be happy in our happiness, and not to think daily, hourly, of the son who is lost in the fathomless spaces of creation.

As for Estrella and myself, we continue Roy's work, helped by Lord Vynne, who is even now preparing an expedition to one of the planets of our nearest star, Alpha Centauri. If this expedition is successful, then, and then only, will he attempt to follow Roy to the confines of the Universe.

The world knows now of his wonderful discovery. Lord Vynne has published his notes and the models of his machinery; and now that this work of mine is completed—this most imperfect, most incomplete record of our marvellous journey—I hope to bring out other books less unworthy, perhaps, of the great genius who has inspired them,—books dealing with our many scientific investigations, and describing the new worlds we have discovered, the new and strange humanities we have studied from our landing-stage in the infinite spaces.

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I dreamt of myself once as a writer of fiction! But since Roy has entered my life, or rather since his influence has become predominant, I have learnt something of the wonders and mysteries of creation, and know that the wildest flights of man's imagination fall short of the unimaginable marvels of real life. Henceforth this shall be my life's work: to tell the world of those wonders I have seen—worlds where there is no night, and worlds where there is no day; worlds basking in the perpetual radiance of several suns, and worlds sleeping in the icy deserts of space, where no light and no warmth can penetrate; humanities that only resemble man in this, that they dream and they hope: humanities in every shape that the mind may conceive, and in shapes that no earthly imagination could ever create: seraph forms and forms of monsters, giants and dwarfs, winged humanities and humanities that crawl—the clothing of the eternal Idea in the manifold garment of Life.

This will be my task,—the task which Roy has pointed out,—to bring, if I can, one glimpse of these wonders to the minds of men and women of this earth, men and women who too often live their little round of life without one thought for the splendours that encompass them like a veil of glory: the splendours of the visible world that are as a foreshadowing and a promise of the splendours of the Invisible.

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Conclusion

In this, my life's task, Estrella will be my helpmate, as she was the helpmate of Roy; and together we shall strive, as Roy once said, "to bring a little light into our dark world."

Where there is work cheerfully done, and the workers love one another—is there not Heaven on Earth?

THE END

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